

BRITAIN'S BEST PC GAMES MAG **SPECIAL EDITION!**

PCZONE

ISSUE 170 **AUGUST 2006**

WORLD EXCLUSIVE!

PREY

The shooter event of the year – review and playable demo!

**SCI-FI
SCOOP!**

New Star Wars
& Star Trek:
Legacy

ELDER SCROLLS IV: OBLIVION

8-page feature on Bethesda's classic
RPG! New expansions revealed!

RETURN TO CITY 17

Half-Life 2: Ep One reviewed!
Is Valve's FPS an Alyx or a Dog?

WIN!

TINY COMPO
What is the name
of Tommy's magic
avian spirit guide
in Prey?

future
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AUGUST 2006

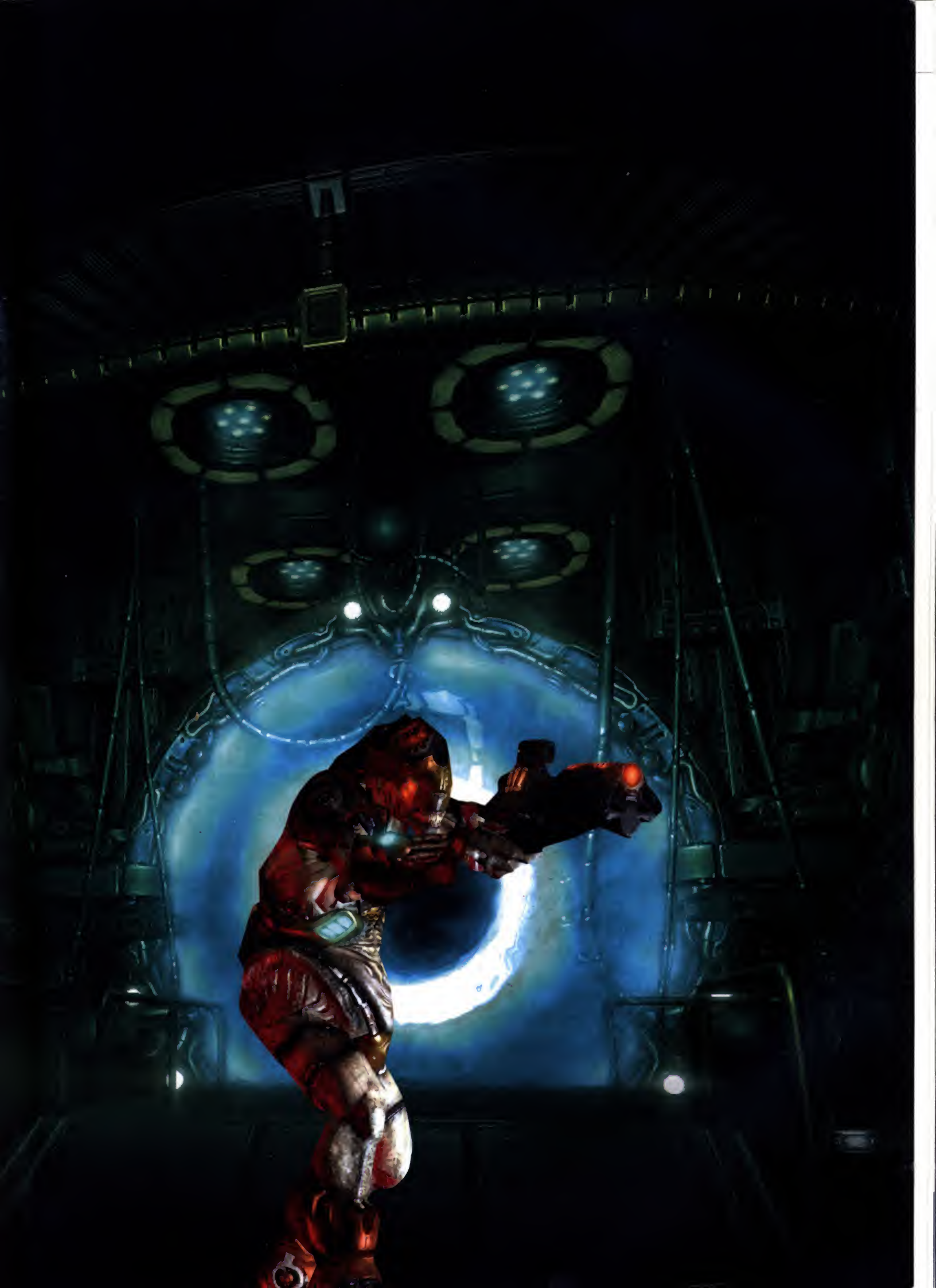


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PREY





WHOSE SIDE WILL YOU BE ON?



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THE LAST STAND

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BRITAIN'S BEST PC GAMES MAG

PCZONE

COVER STORY

58

PREY

The shooter that's going to turn your puny world upside down and inside out. Then spray alien goo all over it

DOMINIK DIAMOND 146

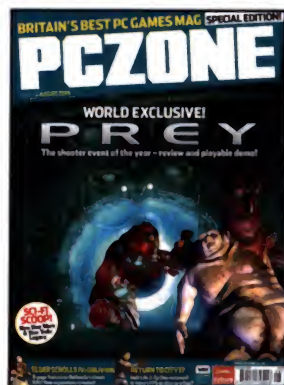
"So this will be my final writing for this great magazine..."



MEDIEVAL 2: TOTAL WAR 44

DISCOVER THE INNER WORKINGS OF THE CREATIVE ASSEMBLY'S NEXT MASTERPIECE!

WHAT'S ON THE COVER?



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Too busy? PC ZONE in 58 words... Starts off with the scoop on the new *Star Wars*, then it's Will's mumbled E3 report and the latest on *BF2142*, *Spore* and *Quake Wars*. There's a great *Dad's Army* gag in a *Medieval 2* caption, then tons of *Oblivion* stuff - then Tommy, Gordon and some Titans get reviewed. Then more stuff, and Dominik Diamond leaves the building.



SUMMER BLOCKBUSTER

WELCOME TO ANOTHER very special PC ZONE - the 170th issue of the UK's longest-running PC games mag. Summer is usually a quiet time for gaming, but not for us. This month we're bringing you the world-exclusive first review of *Prey*, a shooter that was formed in the mind of ex-id Software supremo Tom Hall at 3D Realms in 1995, and now finally, over a decade later, explodes in a shower of mutated human gibbs onto your PC monitor (see page 58).

As well as commemorating the shooter event of the summer with a special die-cut edition (that's where we pay lots of money to the printers so they'll cut a whopping great hole in the front cover), we also have the exclusive *Prey* playable demo on our double-sided ZONE DVD. 3D Realms and Human Head have produced one of the best game demos of recent years, complete with an extensive single-player experience and complete multiplayer trial with two maps and two deathmatch modes - so make sure you check it out.

Oh, and while you're perusing our 9GB disc, you might want to experience a trial of two excellent MMOGs - *Auto Assault* and *D&D Online: Stormreach* - as well as the reborn *Sensible Soccer 2006*, a game that sapped days, weeks and months of my life back in the early 1990s. Time to lock the door to keep out any annoying family/partners/pets/housemates/fellow patients, draw the curtains on those bright rays of sunshine and boot up your PC - it's going to be a great summer...

Jamie Sefton

Jamie Sefton, editor



New ways to scare, slash, stab, kill and survive.



Nintendo



Use the stylus as a knife and lash out at the undead as they come on smarter and faster than ever. Test your sanity in a fully 3D world of claustrophobia and tension, then drag your friends in with you for a bout of wireless multiplayer horror. Resident Evil Deadly Silence out on 31.03.06

CAPCOM

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WIN!
A CUDDLY
HEADCRAB!

AMAZING READER COMPO! 116

FREEPLAY/FREWARE

Freeware
Steve Hogarty is some sort of free-game loving fiend...

TUMIKI FIGHTERS
Side-scrolling shooters are getting sticky

ORBITER
Hubble, bubble, toil and space rubble

CAVE STORY
Once upon a time...

WEBGAME OF THE MONTH
The Brook

FREE GAMES!

111 FREEPLAY
Every month, a one-man Irish sweatshop thanklessly trawls through hours of free gaming - and all for you...

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PC CD-ROM



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UPFRONT



MEET THE TEAM

Now with added headcrabs! Win one on page 116...

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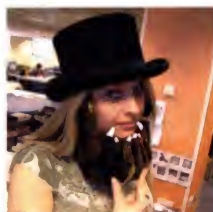
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SUZY WALLACE

Reviews Editor

AGE: 27 and a few days

LIKES: Cats in humorous poses

DISLIKES: Her neighbours

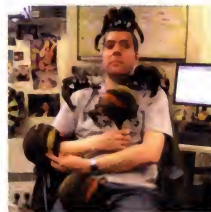
FANCIES: A nice cuppa

FAVOURITE GAME: *Final Fantasy VII*

PLAYING NOW: *Rise & Fall*

Civilizations At War, *HL2: Ep One*

Suzy Wallace, nature's untamed beauty, turned 27 this month. She looks so much younger than her actual age, that Eddie Murphy phoned her up to reprise his role as Axel Foley and repeatedly scream: "Get the f*** outta here!" at her. So, how does the transition of mid to late-twenties suit Ms Wallace? Has the myriad wonder of human potential opened up to her? Is it like going to bed, and waking to realise you've gone up a level? Perhaps she's researched a new branch on a tech tree, and has inadvertently found Hinduism? "It's a bit crap, really," she confides.



JAMIE SEFTON

Glorious leader

After Leeds failed to gain promotion, Sefton wreaked his own mini revenge on the footballing world by naming a **ZONE**-staffed *Sensi Soccer* team and using them to lose against Paraguay.

WHAT ARE YOU PLAYING: *Sensible Soccer 2006*

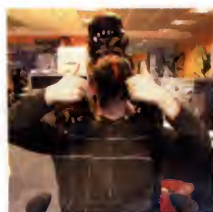


DALE PRATLEY

Art god

Dale likes nothing better than a tasty graphic. After eating over 500 hi-res bitmaps, he takes a hanky and does a tiny belch into it. That hanky then goes to the printers, where it becomes **PC ZONE**.

WHAT ARE YOU PLAYING: *Do Macs have games?*

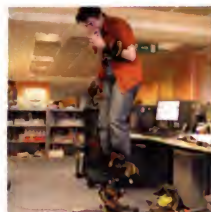


WILL PORTER

Deputy Editor

Fresh back from E3, Will still paints a picture of long hours, dense crowds and sensibly-clothed booth babes. So, Will, why has your spiral-bound notepad only got a doodle of a boob?

WHAT ARE YOU PLAYING: *Half-Life 2: Episode One*



STEVE HOGARTY

Staff writer

Steve went back home to Ireland this month, and revived himself by bathing in a lake of Guinness and rainbows. Entering the lake exhausted, hours later he emerged cruciform, floating.

WHAT ARE YOU PLAYING: *The Movies: Stunts & Effects*

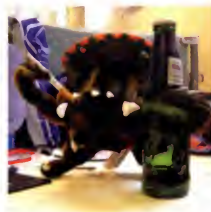


DOMINIK DIAMOND

Superstar DJ

And so we bid farewell to our resident back-page bandit, aka gaming's most alliterative celebrity. You can still see him on TV, radio and a set of soon-to-be-released Diamond kitchenware.

WHAT ARE YOU PLAYING: *Wham!'s The Final*



JON 'LOG' BLYTH

Staff writer

Log's just moved house, so if that nauseating smell of three-day-old laundry that follows him is still around next week, he's going to have to accept his hygiene standards need a makeover.

WHAT ARE YOU PLAYING: *Robotron 2084*

STUFF THAT'S HELPED US THIS MONTH... Dogs on the bonnets of speeding cars, dogs throwing cars and basically dogs in general
STUFF THAT'S BEEN OF NO HELP WHATSOEVER... Tax on imported headcrabs, cockroaches and US games journals with stupid blue hair

STUFF WE'VE BEEN TALKING ABOUT...

E3	130 Mins	Very hard work apparently. Really, really hard work. The drunken photos are fabricated.
LIP-SYNCHING TRANSEXUALS	20 Mins	No better way to spend a Wednesday night according to some sources.
THEME PARKS	14 Mins	And why going to two in the same month is pretty much unthinkable.
WILL'S COCKROACH INVASION	245 Mins	And the subsequent tenant revolution in his building.
PREY	67 Mins	Has gloop ever been so gloopy? Has slime ever been so slimy?
THE OBLIVION LEVELLING SYSTEM	194 Mins	"So now I can't get about a third of the farcking spells! For farck's sake!"
DATA'S PENIS	28 Mins	He was, you see, a 'fully functional' creation in <i>Star Trek: The Next Gen</i> . And thus could do the business. True story.
X-MEN: THE LAST STAND	43 Mins	What a crock of shit. Really, what were they thinking?
BAD PIRATE JOKES	23 Mins	"What's a pirate's favourite measuring device?" "A Yarr!-dstick!"
THE WORLD CUP	128 Mins	Even though by the time you read this, we might have been lanked by Trinidad & Tobago.

WIN!

Tiny Compo. Give us the correct answer to the mini-question on the cover and you might win some truly sensational prizes. You might win some mediocre ones too. Who can say? Only the god of competitions, that's who! Send your entry on a postcard addressed to: Tiny Compo (170), PC ZONE Future Publishing, 2 Balcombe Street, London NW1 6NW. The first entry dragged plucked from the bag by Steve's young and slender hand wins the lot. Closing date: Wednesday, July 19, 2006. The winner of issue 168's Tiny Compo was Simon Hurst, who knew that the evil computer in *System Shock 2* was Shodan. Hark at him.

GENERAL COMPETITION TERMS & CONDITIONS: 1. Only completed entries received before the closing date will be entered. 2. Winners will be notified by post. 3. No cash alternative. 4. Prizes not necessarily as shown. 5. No correspondence will be entered into. 6. The editor's decision is final. 7. Responsibility cannot be accepted for lost or undelivered entries. 8. Competitions are not open to readers outside the UK or employees of Future or its affiliated companies, their families, agents or anyone professionally connected with the competition. Phew!

Closing date: July 20, 2006

LETTERS



Jamie Sefton looks just like our muscle-bound postie. Sort of...



BUT IS IT ART?

Films: art. Music: art. Chopping up a cow: art. So why not games? Why, among all these so-called 'artistic' mediums, are games still considered to be childish, brainless and unsophisticated in the eyes of modern society? What kind of world do we live in where whole landscapes can be hand-crafted and brought to life in such masterpieces as *Oblivion* and still be brushed aside as mindless entertainment by the 'arty' crowd? I'm sorry, but I'd rather wander around Cyrodiil, gasping at its beauty and craftsmanship than stand in the Tate Modern and watch a video of Damien Hirst shitting into a bowl. CUBert *MM*

I absolutely agree. While I think it's good we don't get too pretentious by writing dull wanky tracts about how videogames are 'defining a new era of post-post-modernist digital expression', some games – such as *Oblivion* that you mention – are as valid as movies, sculpture or any artform. The fact that two videogames – *Grand Theft Auto* and *Tomb Raider* – recently featured in the UK's top ten design icons of the 20th century shows progress is being made. You never know – in ten years time you might be able to visit a virtual Tate and watch a video of Mr Freeman...

DOUBLE-BEARDED

I had to write to you, as I got rather excited when I read your games Buyer's Guide in issue 169. Looking at your list of top five RPGs, I noticed *Oblivion* was rightly at the top, but next to it was a screenshot of a double-barrelled shotgun! Where can you get this weapon in *Oblivion*? I'd love to dish out some double-barrelled justice à la *Doom II* to the hordes of *Oblivion* scum! Ibbo

Ah... Er... Um... Yes. Due to an 'administrative error', the wrong pic was attached to *Oblivion*, so I'm afraid you won't find any double-barrelled shotguns hidden within Bethesda's classic. However, we do have tons of other juicy interviews and gameplay secrets in our *Oblivion* feature – turn to page 48.

GROWN-UP GAMING

I believe there's a sad lack of adult games on the market (and no, I don't mean that sort of adult game). A sophisticated and unpatronising gaming experience is a wonderful thing. *Max Payne 2*, with its layers of juicy irony and pathos, is a member of an elite group of titles such as *Mafia* (and of course, the Steam-driven behemoth that is *Half-Life 2*) that real grown-ups

Best for horizontal fire.



can play. But publishers seem to underestimate the demand for these kind of games. Well, I have news for them: I'm 19, so well and truly within the all-important 16-to-25-year-old computer game-buying age bracket. Therefore, I want to say something to everybody in this key demographic (and everybody else who buys games) – YOU have the power. Vote with your wallets. Better still, vote with your lighters and burn every copy of *The Sims* you can get your hands on. Joe H

I think there's a damn good collection of intelligent 'adult' games out at the moment – *Condemned*, *Prey* and *Hitman: Blood Money*, to name just three. The PC games player demographic is older than that of console players (our DVD now has a permanent '18' BBFC rating), so publishers would be unwise to ignore gamers like you and me, Joe. The signs are positive, with incredible, 'intelligent' PC titles such as *Bioshock*, *C&C3*, *Spore*, *Fallout 3* and *Crysis* on the way.

HELLO!

I ADMIT IT, I WAS AN EX-READER – I'D JOINED THE GROUP OF



Les is a god in *Quake 4*.

WIN!

Letter of the Month

Physically sick

So, *PC ZONE* isn't a big fan of physics cards, eh? Just wait until you next parachute into Generic Warehouse 101 and find you can't complete the level because your PC can't handle the fully-destructible, accurately-modelled walls of individual matchsticks. And what are you going to do when they bring out AI cards? While your friends will be engrossed in *Counter-Strike 2*, you'll be whining about the good old days when AI walked into walls and ran around in circles. You'll be screwed in the long run, having to fork out a couple of hundred quid every two years and smile through gritted teeth like the rest of the PC masses. At this rate, at least we'll save money on processors – there'll be nothing left for them to do. T Potter

The success of the new physics cards ultimately depends on developers, publishers – and you – supporting them. The problem is that such cards are not essential purchases; so it's more likely the technology will be incorporated into existing graphics cards if it catches on. Have a non physics-enhanced card on us.

ONE OF THESE!

You need a good graphics card. We need letters. (Good ones, mind, not rubbish ones like 'PC ZONE rulez, can I have a graphics card please?')

Well, serendipity now! The two needs have collided, right here, right now. Write us a letter today. If it wins Letter of the Month, we'll send you a superb Connect3D X1600 Pro 512MB!

SAY WHAT?

"I'd rather wander round Cyrodiil gasping at its beauty than watch Damien Hirst shit in a bowl"

CUBert *MM* doesn't mince his words...

DESPERATE MEN HUDDLED IN FRONT OF MAGAZINE SHELVES (EYES OFF THE TOP SHELF), SEARCHING FOR THE RIGHT GAMES MAG. I'D TRIED VARIOUS OTHERS, BUT THERE WAS SOMETHING LACKING. NOW, AFTER GETTING MY MAY ISSUE 167, I'M HOOKED AGAIN. BRILLIANT. GLAD YOU'RE ALL STILL THERE! ANYWAY, WHAT I WANTED TO SAY WAS, AS A LOVER OF THE FPS, I'VE JUST FINISHED *QUAKE 4*. NOW, I'M 50 NEXT MONTH, SO I'M ALLOWED TO USE GOD MODE, OK? THANKS GUYS – JUST GOING TO LOAD *SIN: EPISODES*. Les

Cheers Les, but there's really no need to shout.

BIG DECISION

Readers like myself wait with baited breath to see what will be the next generation of fun to approach the PC at the E3 videogames show in Los Angeles. However, for *PC ZONE* journalists, this must be the trip of the year. How do you decide which of your esteemed colleagues should go? Flip several coins? A points system based on several factors? Arm-

wrestling? Or perhaps just whoever has been toadying the most recently? Andrew Poulter

Well, the arm-wrestling definitely worked for our man-mountain Martin Korda – and as for Will, I said he could go as long as he covered every single game on the show floor and made a special video diary. You can see how he fared from page 16 onwards and on this month's DVD.

BACK OFF MRS EVANS!

I'm a 13-year-old gamer, and I've been playing *Battlefield 2* and *Counter-Strike: Source* lately, spending all my weekends playing these games. However, my mum has started picking on me saying that I'm addicted (which is true, but I don't really care). It's getting so bad that once she cut my Internet cable, since that was the only way to get me off it! So now I'm going to prove her wrong – I'm going to be a games developer to show her I'm not wasting my time. I don't care if it's one pound a week (but it better not be). If I can do this, then years from now I can laugh in my mum's face and say: "See, addiction pays off!" Elliot Evans



Heh heh. I can remember thinking exactly the same thing when I was younger, playing for days at a time on my ZX Spectrum. Your mum's just looking out for you Elliot, and you do need to get a decent education too, but the videogames industry is now a legitimate career for anyone out there wanting to make money from making/playing/writing about games. I hope you do make it, then you can invite me round to your mum's and we'll both laugh in her face.

CHEATING SCUM

If the cheats aren't controlled, online gaming is going to die. I've seen a website that actually sells a *Battlefield 2* hack program, and read the forum where the pond life who've bought it delight in the fact that it isn't detected by

Everything about *Mafia* screams classic – you owe it to yourself to try it. Do you agree? Is there a game you love to the same degree, or even further? G_Man_007

I know a few people hate *Mafia* because the cars don't go fast enough. I tried to explain it wasn't *GTA* and that the cars speed up quite a bit by the end, but they didn't listen. Heathens. liquid_metal

One of the most memorable moments is when I was being pursued by gangsters in my taxi and had to take these two hoods back to the restaurant. It felt exactly like arriving in a foreign city late at night and trying to find your way to the hotel. Sturdygurdy

For me, *Monkey Island 2: LeChuck's Revenge* changed my gaming passions, put me here in this forum, and indeed, changed my life – I'm a writer and I try to be as inventive and hilarious. TheTingler

Join in the forum fun at www.pczone.co.uk

MY IRON JUNG

For three years *ZONE* staff members have worked to craft renowned creator of analytical psychology, Dr Carl Jung (1875-1961), out of metal. A fount of knowledge, fed with gaming data from past and present, he exists for your enlightenment...



DEAR DR JUNG,

Q I'm a bit confused by what's going on with *F.E.A.R.* – Monolith aren't doing the expansion pack, so what's happening with the sequel? Simon Brown

A Warner Brothers now own Monolith, who are producing a title that continues the storyline of *F.E.A.R.*, uses the same characters and is set in the same universe. The name of the game, however, is owned by VU Games – meaning that Monolith's *F.E.A.R.* sequel cannot go by its previous moniker. So we may get two *F.E.A.R.* sequels – one with the brand name and new setting, and another without the name, full cast and situation returning. The expansion pack *Extraction Point* seems unaffected though.

DEAR DR JUNG,

Q Do you know any more about *KOTOR III*? A few hours spent on the LucasArts/Obsidian/BioWare forums reveals more hope than expectation that it'll be produced. Paul Kemp

A I can provide nothing firm, but despite *KOTOR 2*'s luke-warm reception and disappointing ending, it's a safe bet it'll make a return. Obsidian CEO Feargus Urquhart says he'd like to make another, and with the forthcoming *Star Wars* televisual treats, it's unlikely George will want to abandon this critically acclaimed reinvention of *Star Wars* gaming. Net speculation expects it to take place in the old Sith Empire and to feature Revan. True or not, it should stretch the *KOTOR* template further than the first sequel managed.

LETTERS



@ letters@pczone.co.uk

✉ letters, pc zone, future publishing, 2 balcombe street, london, nw1 6nw

PC ZONE Around the World SPECIAL!



Animal magic.

PCZONE TRAVEL
Chris De Lange
Where? Pilanesberg
Game Reserve, SA
Class: Elephant Turner



Who forgot the Ambre Solaire?

PCZONE TRAVEL
Carl Wills
Where? Gran Canaria
Class: DJ Carlos Fan



Gladiator, ready?

PCZONE TRAVEL
Jack Wilson
Where? Roman
Colosseum, Tunisia
Class: Gladiator



He's a bit shy...

PCZONE TRAVEL
Loren Burroughs
Where? Mini-Hollywood
Spain
Class: Holidaymaker

We want photos of you with PC ZONE in the most exotic or inappropriate locations. Candid celeb shots count double. Every one printed wins a prize!

will keep a record stored so nobody can steal it without hearing from my lawyers!
Ross Hobson



While not exactly modern-day, Webzen's new MMO *Huxley* is your best bet Ross. *Huxley* promises to deliver a *Judge Dredd*-meets-*UT*-meets-*PlanetSide* experience, with hundreds of gamers fighting each other in massive battle zones. We'll have an exclusive hands-on next issue.

SIGNING OFF

I noticed in the last issue that you've started having signatures for all your writers' columns. Nothing wrong with that, but I'm slightly worried by Will Porter's strange, childish scrawl. If you analysed that, you'd probably jump to the conclusion that he's a bit simple.

Big Pete

Will Porter

And you'd be absolutely right, Big Pete...

IDIOT'S CORNER

Real calls from real idiots...

IDIOT

Hello, Mr Wallace?

PCZONE

No, Miss Wallace.

IDIOT

Mr Wallace?

PCZONE

No... MISS. How can I help?

IDIOT

I'm coming round your house to do some work.

PCZONE

I have no idea what you're talking about.

IDIOT

Mr Wallace?

PCZONE

No, MISS.

IDIOT

Oh... (Hangs up)

Punkbuster (or so they say). Quite why anyone would get satisfaction from cheating is beyond me. Sadly, some players do and will get away with it if they can. Punkbuster catches many, but I've witnessed players obviously cheating on Punkbuster-enabled servers, so it can take time to detect new hacks. There's a virtual arms race going on!
Gavin Hay

Unfortunately, there'll always be gamers who want to cheat – like hacking, beating a system such as Punkbuster is actually a thrill to some PC users. As you rightly say, it'll always be a constant battle between the cheat-busters and the cheats, with us everyday PC gamers stuck in

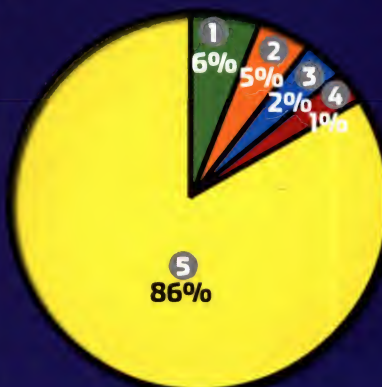
the middle. Watch out for Pavel Barter's Special Report on this topic next issue.

MORE WAR!

I'm an *Eve Online* player, but I'm massively bored with it after well over two years of playing. However, I was thinking the other day – why are developers making so much *D&D*-style rubbish when they could make a modern-day MMO? *Battlefield 2*-meets-*WWII Online*-meets-*PlanetSide* – modern combat, thousands of players, logistics and decent command structure. Land, sea and air – so much potential! Instead, we just get *LOTR Online*, *EverQuest*, *Camelot*, *Warhammer* etc etc. Oh, and by the way, I'm copyrighting this and

The Big Question

Reasons Microsoft want you to upgrade to Windows Vista



- 1 Vastly improved games performance: 6%
- 2 Superb DX10 graphics: 5%
- 3 Easier game installation: 2%
- 4 Seamless integration with handheld devices: 1%
- 5 To make lots more money: 86%



TOTAL WAR: ERAS



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TOTAL WAR

SHOGUN
TOTAL WAR
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MEDIEVAL
TOTAL WAR

MEDIEVAL
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ROME
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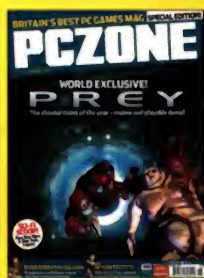
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COVER STORY

PREY

After 11 years in the pipeline, *Prey* has finally finished its troublesome gestation period. Will Human Head's twisted baby turn heads, as well as stomachs?



THE FPS MONORAIL thrill ride; a developer's way of saying, "seriously, we want you to see all this stuff, we've put a lot of effort in". They're like a movie where you can look around, jump and turn your torch on and off. In *Prey*, one of the first things you do is get tractor-beamed out of your workplace, restrained and given the non-optional tour through one monstrous hulk of ship, watching Earth become obscured by the jarring mesh of steel and flesh that's soon to become your playground. It's mighty impressive stuff. First mooted in 1995, we can exclusively reveal how the maturing process has treated *Prey*. Step this way...

PAGE

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PCZONE

UPFRONT

Everything that matters in the world of PC gaming

GATES TO DESTRUCTION?

WHILE AT E3 this year, I stumbled on a game called *Shadowrun* and, to be frank, it looked like a stinking heap of shit. It's one of the flagship games that Microsoft are waving around as part of their 'Live Anywhere' agenda – a policy that's aimed at tying together Xbox 360 and Windows Vista users through every which way – even through mobile phones.

Shadowrun is essentially a sub-UT deathmatch game and a case in point in terms of my healthy Microsoft mistrust. Upon discovering that 360 players could take on the PC hierarchy, I pointed out to the developers that this would no doubt give mouse and keyboard users a significant advantage. No matter, the PC controls will be loosened to ensure equality. Sigh. What, honestly, is the point?

For all the advantages that Vista may entail, to my mind this boils down to the bastardisation of our beloved gaming medium. I, for one, don't want a new corporately endorsed Gamertag – I've been Batsphinx since I was 14. I love owning a PC: over time, its foibles and everything installed upon it has come to echo the way I work – and now it's threatened with a torrent of faceless conformity. Goodbye Xfire, hello MS Friends List. Goodbye Team Speak, hello Gates-sanctioned conformity. Who knows? Goodbye freeware, hello monthly charge?

Perhaps I'm being over-concerned. Perhaps capitalism won't win after all. Here's hoping, eh? We'll have a full feature on what Vista means to you next month.

Will Porter

Will Porter, deputy editor

STAR WARS: THE NEXT GENERATION

The remarkable technology behind the new LucasArts actioner that could pull the ears off a Gungan

THE GAME IS as yet unannounced. We don't even know for sure that it'll be heading to PC (although our invite to the Lucas E3 booth can't have been a coincidence). But the technology behind the next *Star Wars* game is nothing short of breathtaking.

Our presentation began with a mocked-up pre-visualisation of the game – a trendy young Jedi using all manner of Force powers on stormtroopers. Lifting them up and slamming them repeatedly into the ground as they screamed in terror; devastating them with Force lightning; hurling one onto a metal outcrop before Force-pulling the entire metal casing he was curled over and crushing him onto the floor; using Force powers on that wreckage to hurl it into the path of a diving TIE Fighter. Impressive stuff, but all CG.

Next we moved onto the magic behind the game proper: DMM – better known as Digital Molecular Matter. Entering the new game's engine, we were shown how other games do their physics – showing us a ball being fired at a plank of wood and it falling apart along pre-ordained lines. Then the new tech game into play with the distinctly un-*Star Wars*-like concept of a two-by-four sheet of plywood – at which bleeping R2-D2s were repeatedly fired. The wood splintered, it wobbled, it cracked, it broke along its grain and – it just looked amazing. Like



We reckon these are bad guys.

real life – only real life in a galaxy far, far away and somewhat long ago.

Essentially, what Lucas seem to have cracked is a way to assign real-life material values to all the objects and environments in their virtual worlds. One tap of a button saw the plywood restored and made harder – meaning that there was far more wobbling and much less splintering when R2's head hit wood. Other potential molecular matter that Lucas showed themselves capable of rendering digitally was demonstrated through the medium of a Jar Jar Binks encased in Carbonite. (See! Who said LucasArts didn't have a sense of humour anymore?) First off it was decided that its texture should be of soft metal – and the R2s began to fire; bending, moulding and denting Jar Jar's stupid face, leaving imprints on him like thumbmarks on warm chocolate. Then the intergalactic buffoon was rendered in rubber – and he distorted this way and that until he started to look like a blob of stretched Blu-tac. And this was even before we saw Jar Jar's

carbonite form encased in ice – slightly translucent, slightly reflective, all real and all shatterable – a project of Lucas cross-development between the games division and ILM. Great, great stuff.

What about the game, though? Well, it's being released in 2007, and among its locations it will showcase Felucia, the fungus planet briefly shown in *Revenge Of The Sith* when all the Jedis get killed off. Further clues, however, lay in the artwork shown here that was secreted around the LucasArts booth. One piece of artwork sees a group of four mercenaries apparently under the command and tutelage of Vader himself. Another sees three clearly light-side characters dealing righteous death to stormtroopers. Another again sees Vader battling wookiees on Kashyyyk. Will you play the mercenaries or will you play the good guys – or both? You can certainly show off a few dark side powers after all. A *Star Wars* game with full physics is something we've been praying for – but we might just have been given something even better.

STOP PRESS!

NEXT EPISODES

Valve have revealed that there will now be three post-*Half-Life 2* episodic instalments. The first is reviewed in this very issue – turn to page 64 for more.

BIO FISH

For *ZONE* readers, there was little new in the E3 *Bioshock* demo – apart from, brilliantly, fish that dart away from undersea windows as you approach. Ace!

WWII GAME #654

Midway have a secret WWII shooter where you'll guide different characters through different takes of the same battle, *Commandos: Strike Force*-style. No title as yet.

22

Enemy Territory: Quake Wars

How many Strogg can you fit in a heavily armoured death vehicle? Find out inside!



44

Medieval 2: Total War

How many soldiers can you fit in one gigantic screenshot? Find out inside!



48

Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion feature

How much content can you fit in one life-sapping RPG? Find out inside!



If this happened in real time, we would weep.



Will we finally be able to feel the Force?



We're not sure what Vader's doing here. Flying? Looks happy, though.



Jungles are the new corridors.

HAZY LOGIC

TimeSplitters developers announce shock shooter *Haze* for PC

SHARING A NAME with a pine-fresh air nicener will hopefully not affect Free Radical's second PC release after *Second Sight*. In an E3 demo delivered by a shouty army man it was explained that *Haze* sees you, Jake Carpenter, employed as a soldier for the Mantel corporation – a globe-spanning operation that's devoted to

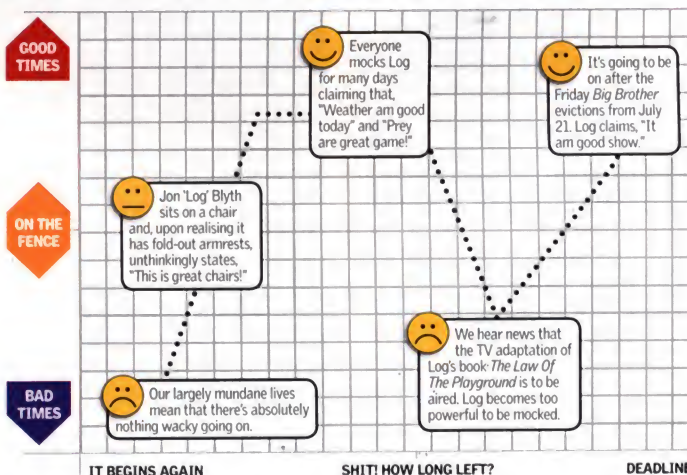
making money and "taking democracy to people who don't even know they want it."

Highly satirical, the showcased level featured a jungle combat bout in South America, at the close of which a comrade shot a local dead. We're concerned about *Haze*'s close console ties, but it's certainly intriguing.

STUFF

The follow-up to *Fahrenheit*, entitled *Heavy Rain*, was on show at E3 in the form of a PS3 tech demo – but you can rest assured that it'll find its way to PC. The demo was entitled 'Audition' and saw a beautifully rendered beautiful woman talking straight to an unseen director, eventually weeping and waving a gun around. The animation and tech behind it seemed stunning – David Cage is onto another winner.

LIFE IS A ROLLERCOASTER



REALITY BYTES

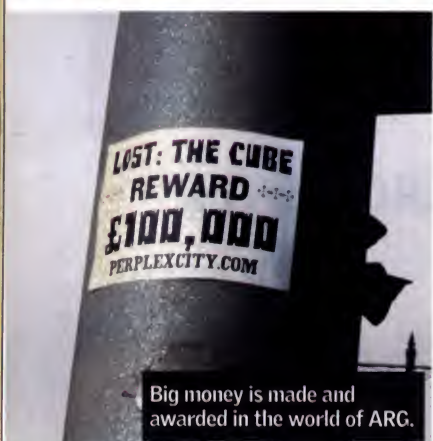
Blurring the line between gaming and life, alternate reality gaming is on the rise. Get ready to neck the blue pill and enter the rabbit hole...



Lost: wrinkled brow specialists.



Perplex City cards are like Panini stickers for grown-ups.



Big money is made and awarded in the world of ARG.



Reporter
Pavel Barter

FANS OF *LOST* – their fragile minds addled with conspiracy theories about a bunch of models (and one fat bloke) stranded on a

tropical beach – recently arrived at the brink of orgasm over a Channel 4 advert. "The Hanso Foundation. Reaching out to a better tomorrow," droned the voiceover. Because of its tenuous connection to the hit TV show, thousands logged on to Hanso's website and phoned a corresponding telephone number. In doing so, they walked straight into the arms of alternate reality gaming.

Crossing the boundaries of fiction into, ahem, the desert of the real, alternate reality games – ARGs – such as *The Lost Experience* incorporate coded websites, newspaper ads, real-world treasure hunts and bothersome 4am phone calls from in-game characters. What's more, they're infecting PC gamers like a medieval pox plague.

"People compare alternate reality gaming and its passionate online communities to MMOGs like *World Of Warcraft* or *Second Life*," says Michael Smith, svengali behind the greatest mind-scrambler of them all, *Perplex*

City. At the heart of Smith's fictional metropolis, hidden via clues on collectable cards, is a very real prize: a cube worth £100,000, stashed somewhere on the globe.

Smith continues: "We've created dozens of different websites and podcasts. We've used mobile phone technology, hidden stuff in cinema adverts, geocashes (GPS treasure hunts), trailed banners behind airplanes flying over cities... There's a massive amount of different ways in which we can disseminate information."

WHAT'S UP DOC?

For a medium that carries the tagline 'This Is Not A Game', ARG might appear as relevant to PC gamers as Bavarian folk music. Not so, explains Dave Szulborski, creator of games (*Chasing The Wish*) and books on the subject (*Through The Rabbit Hole*). "ARGs are the next step beyond traditional videogames – a way of providing a more realistic and engaging experience without relying on artificial 3D graphics, artificial intelligence or automated (and therefore artificial) interaction. That's why many videogamers find ARGs so attractive."

The attraction began in 2000 when EA began planning a flagship online FPS

called *Majestic*. However, the head of the project, Neil Young, had other ideas: he wanted to create a rich in-game world with a *Matrix*-esque backstory. "Developing a FPS to tell a story is like driving a car into your living room just to listen to the radio," says former *Majestic* developer Greg Gibson.

"Neil found a better way. He created an alternate reality game, although we didn't use that expression at the time. We thought of it more as the logical evolution of the commercial adventure game. We wanted it to infiltrate your life, like a version of the David Fincher movie, *The Game*."

UP IN SMOKE

This 'massively single-player' online game brewed a cauldron of conspiracy and science fiction, as players scoured the Web for clues, watched videos, sent emails and communicated with in-game characters. *Majestic's* dark plot was so convincing that the FBI launched an investigation into one of the game's 'top secret' documents. Then a run-in between planes and skyscrapers ruined everything.

"The unofficial company line is that 9/11 doomed *Majestic*," sighs Gibson. "Not only did we take the game offline for a while, but in the following weeks

Majestic was EA's early foray into conspiracy and alternate reality gaming.



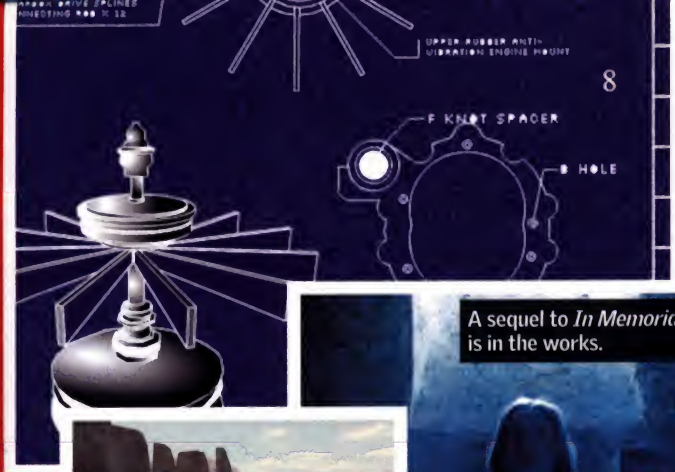
In Memoriam sees a killer send emails to your real-life account. Creepy.



Is there anything you want Pavel Barter to investigate? (Warning: some jobs might be considered too big or too small...)

@ letters@pczone.co.uk

✉ pavel barter, pc zone,
2 balcombe st, london, nw1 6nw



A sequel to *In Memoriam* is in the works.



Gun used clear ARG advertising.

"ARGs are the next step beyond traditional videogames... That's why gamers find ARGs so attractive"

Dave Szulborski, ARG creator & author

and months, people weren't keen to play a government conspiracy game that threatened to wake you up in the middle of the night with frantic phone calls. Ultimately though, we just didn't create an experience that appealed to a large number of people."

In 2001, *Lost* creator JJ Abrams had 'preliminary talks' with EA about licensing *Majestic's* platform for his show *Alias*. EA declined, reckoning that the concept was more about marketing than gaming. Rather ironic that. Abrams has since returned to the theme with *The Lost Experience*, while marketing has played a massive role in ARG's emergence.

GIVE US A CLUE

The first successful ARG was created to hype the Stephen Spielberg movie, *A.I.* This murder-mystery whodunnit – nicknamed 'The Beast' by its fanbase – hid clues in a labyrinth of movie posters, trailers and websites. Hot on its heels was *Halo 2* promo 'I Love Bees', in which players deciphered GPS coordinates, answered public pay phones

and travelled from one clue to another like Scooby Doo.

In 2005, as part of Dave Szulborski's 'The Art Of The Heist' promo for Audi motors, ARG players tried to sneak past security guards at a US music festival and steal a memory chip. Even clothing lines have been given alternate reality checks. Aren't players bothered that ARGs are the ultimate product placements?

"So far, most of these promotional vehicles have been quite artistic, and I wouldn't say that the tie-in necessarily detracts from the production value," reckons fan Sean C Stacey, who adds that the biggest ARG of 'em all – *Perplex City* – is promotion-free.

The ARG community has developed a hive mind when solving puzzles, and include "men and women, normal and geek, all the way from 13-year-old student to middle-aged housewife", continues Stacey. As well as hanging out at ARGN.com, they're united by campaigns such as 'Last Call Poker' (a promo for videogame *Gun*), where gamers played tombstone card games

Live Immersive Gaming

ARG with bruises on Buck Rogers sets



La Fuga (Madrid)

Tourists become feisty inmates for this prison break drama, a £10 million 'RPG' housed in a converted bank. It's like *Myst* getting frisky with *The Chronicles Of Riddick*, only without the extended periods of boredom or crowbar-induced brain damage.



SWITS (Boston, US)

An interactive adventure set in a festering Pharaoh tomb and featuring enough dry ice to sedate a 1970's prog rock band. Solve puzzles, dodge traps and act all Indiana Jones-like for all of 45 minutes.



Tactile Dome (San Francisco, US)

Escape from a giant dome in a game created in 1971. You're in pitch black and must use sense alone – a bit like playing *F.E.A.R.* blindfolded with the surround sound turned up. Great for shy couples on a first date.

in a San Fran graveyard. In February 2006, over 200 AR gamers took part in a high-tech *Perplex City* scavenger hunt around London.

ACTING UP

Do these outdoor jollities leave room for PC videogames? After the failure of *Majestic*, the mainstream games industry steered clear of ARGs, although a little known French title suggests that the tide might be turning.

"From the moment you install *In Memoriam*, you know that the CD-ROM is unlike any other. It's a program devised by a serial killer," chuckles developer Eric Viennot. "Throughout the game, you live out real experiences, receive personal emails, surf websites to pick up clues and continue playing without the CD-ROM." *In Memoriam's* sequel (*Evidence: The Last Ritual*), showcased at this year's E3, will use Google maps for puzzle-solving and real tools to encrypt or decipher text. Real-world actors will continue to respond to player's emails.

Alternate reality gaming isn't about to go away, contends Michael Smith:



Halo loved bees for AR publicity.

"We're keen to take *Perplex City* into new platforms – TV and film are obvious ones. When the cube is found, then we move on to Season Two, where a whole new mystery and series of adventures await. I'd like *Perplex City* to run for decades."

With the growing popularity of *Perplex City* and *Lost's* JJ Abrams now embracing the genre, it's only a matter of time before another big-budget big-concept ARG emerges, further changing the course of PC gaming and scrambling our brains. "What is real? How do you define real?" asked smarty-pants Morpheus in *The Matrix*. Venturing into the mysterious world of ARG, you'd better prepare to ask yourself the same questions... **PCZ**





To aid your imagination: this area is hot and smells a bit of chips.

WHAT I DONE ON MY HOLIDAYS AT



An exclusive report by *Will Porter*, aged 26 and a half



NORMALLY AT THIS point of the year, Steve Hill regales one and all with tales of drunken debauchery, leggy models poking him with sticks and urination at the Playboy Mansion. Having been journalistically raised on tales of anarchy and Californian derring-do at the E3s of old, I was excited and terrified in equal parts at what lay in wait for me on Sunset Boulevard. As indeed, on my behalf, was my girlfriend, who had unfortunately come across a boob-laden Steve Hill E3 report a few weeks previous to my own adventure, and who'd consequently branded him as

some sort of antichrist temptation figure. When the news finally came that Hill himself would not be attending this year's Californian jamboree, in favour of a token luxury poker cruise around the Caribbean for a gambling magazine, the relief was palpable.

ANARCHY AVOIDED

Thing is, when you're not Steve Hill, E3 is bloody hard work. Fun work, obviously, but still 14-hour days of writing and strong coffee – especially when you're doubling up as a *PC ZONE* magazine journalist and an on-the-spot www.computerandvideogames.com website journalist. I mean, my most exotic moment probably came when I was stuck in a car for an hour and a half driving the wrong way up Sunset Boulevard, with a Ukrainian bloke I know and three pissed Russian RTS designers sitting in the back shouting about their favourite Russian euphemisms for 'arse' and 'penis'. That, my friend, is true rock and roll.

Also present at the show were office pals Team CVG (one of whom, Matt Wales, had the redoubtable pleasure of bearing witness to my arse crack every morning in our shared hotel room),

ZONE godfather Paul Presley in his new guise as MMOG magazine magnate and man mountain Martin Korda.

Korda's primary triumph at the show was following my cunning plan of blagging entry to a roof-top Nintendo pool party by pretending to be a well-known *Daily Mail* journalist. After ten minutes of expressing mock outrage that someone else had gained entry under his assumed name, a severely jet-lagged Korda was politely informed by a dagger-eyed PR lady that not only was the national paper journo already present at the party, but he was also silver-haired, Scottish, a personal friend of hers and not at all Slovakian in appearance whatsoever.

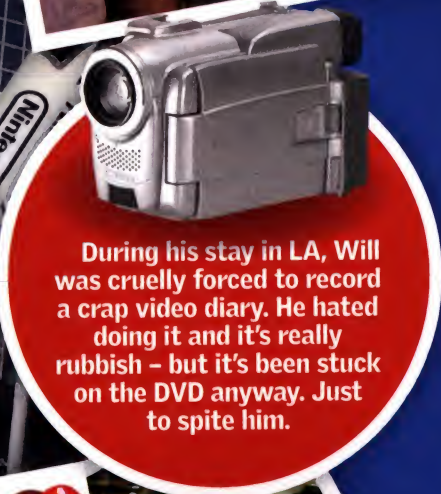
Thankfully, the man from the *Mail* laughed it off, and retrieved Korda from his woeful dejection in the hotel lobby shortly after. Thus, Korda managed to see Nintendo's parade of aimless ladies in bikinis sitting on the side of a pool, but the perils of over-blaggage became more than apparent.

TO BE HONEST...

I hate to be a shameless nerd though, but the best thing about E3 isn't the booth babes (who now have a strictly



The guy scratching his ear had actually already been there for two hours.



During his stay in LA, Will was cruelly forced to record a crap video diary. He hated doing it and it's really rubbish - but it's been stuck on the DVD anyway. Just to spite him.



enforced 'no bikini' code of conduct), nor is it the occasional free beer of an evening. It's shaking the hands of an endless barrage of developers who you fundamentally respect and admire, and them actively pretending to be pleased to meet you too. It's being given a guided tour around Outland in *World Of Warcraft: The Burning Crusade* before meeting up with Valve outside the centre, then staring wistfully into the eyes of Bill Roper, before bypassing the LucasArts security cordon and seeing the amazing tech that'll be running the next *Star Wars* actioner. It's great, it's geek heaven.

And the highlight of the show? Forget the showbiz, forget seeing the back of Paris Hilton's head: being in a darkened room with Will Wright and his *Spore* presentation was an experience that eclipsed all others. And *Simpsons* creator Matt Groening was in there too - which made it all that much better. Twenty minutes in a room containing two true geniuses, out of a week largely spent surrounded by the dead-eyed, the braying and the loud-shirted. Roll on next year! If they let me go again, that is.. **PCZ**

E3 Awards 2006

The good, the bad and the just plain embarrassing...

THE INAUGURAL 'VERY FUN' AWARD FOR HANDS-ON EXCELLENCE
Stranglehold

MOST AMUSING MOMENT TO EVERYONE APART FROM WILL
Will accidentally punching himself in the face

THE 'BIZARRELY ENOUGH' AWARD FOR PUBLISHER SUPPORT OF THE PC
EA for *C&C3*, *Spore*, *Crysis* and *BF2142*

THE 'PERSISTENCE' AWARD FOR COMPETENT US UNDER-AGE DRINKING
Sprightly 20-year-old PC ZONE noob Andy Robinson

BEST GIBBERISH FROM DRUGGED-UP LOCAL
A Californian girl with a pink self-pleasuring device in her handbag asking that a group of jourmos proof-read a text message that was due to split her up with a boyfriend who had taken to cheating on her with a porn star. How the other half live...

MOST BIZARRE CELEBRITY GOSSIP
That Lemmy from Motorhead had played and adored the opening parts of *Half-Life 2: Episode One*

UNFORGIVABLY NERDY DARK HORSE OF E3
Star Trek: Legacy

MOST FORLORN EXPRESSION OF ABSOLUTE DEJECTION
Failed ligger Martin Korda

MOST SURREAL BACKSTAGE MOMENT
Carefully stepping over exhausted Webzen booth babes spread out on the floor outside the Huxley meeting room

SIMULTANEOUSLY MOST EMPTY STAND AND STAND WITH THE MOST NUBILE LADIES
Nokia N-Gage

HIGHEST STORY AND VIDEO COUNT FROM ANY EUROPEAN GAMES SITE
www.computerandvideogames.com

'DIAMOND IN THE ROUGH' AWARD FOR UNEXPECTED GOODNESS
Warhammer Online: Age Of Reckoning

GAME OF THE SHOW
Spore

THE ANNUAL CHIP BUMGARDNER AWARD FOR BEST AMERICAN NAME
Still Chip Bumgardner





It's a man's life in the GDF.
A very short man's life.

OVER THE BORDER...

ENEMY TERRITORY: QUAKE WARS



Will Porter crashes a wide variety of vehicles and has his guts sucked out a few times – all thanks to the plucky mega-texture...

DEVELOPER Splash Damage/id PUBLISHER Activision WEBSITE www.quakewars.com PREVIOUSLY IN... 163

THE LOWDOWN

Still feels a lot like
Wolfenstein: Enemy Territory



Chunky, solid and
weighty controls



Very core of gameplay
demands teamwork



Flow of battle excellently
managed by clever
map design



The inept die,
and die often



**ETA
Q4**

A STUNNING YET blindingly obvious fact strikes you when you're first playing *Quake Wars*, something that sets in just after the first moments of exhilaration. For me, it came a few seconds after I'd strapped myself onto a Husky quad-bike and roared over a series of ingeniously placed dips, jumps and ramps into the fray, leaping over the metal cases of slower GDF tanks trundling from right to left below me. That fact is, quite simply, that you've been here before.

It's been lost in the amazing visuals, the filthy gut-sucking tactics of the Strogg, the cavalcade of beautifully chunky vehicles and the advent of the much-fabled mega-texture – but the clue is in the name: *Enemy Territory*. The game feels just like *Wolfenstein: Enemy Territory* – a stronger more solid variant on it, perhaps – but the vibe's still there. If you try really hard, you can still just about smell the Nazis.

In fact, the first task at hand for me and my band of GSF soldiers was the wholly *Wolf*-esque task of building a bridge over a small valley – with engineers busying themselves with construction, soldiers vainly attempting to fend off the Strogg and medics handing out bandages and paper towels. Things weren't progressing well though: we needed to shift a mobile command point over the as yet non-existent bridge and through a tunnel to set up shop military-wise, and we were being nailed. Being nailed, specifically, by an inconvenient Strogg gun turret that had been installed by the tunnel mouth.

It was then that I, under the knowing tutelage of id designer Jerry Keenan who was standing over my right shoulder, 'chuted into my spawn point (after death by turret) as a crafty field ops specialist. I opened up my construction tool and selected an artillery turret. An RTS-style

3D blueprint appeared in front of me (red where it couldn't be placed, green where it could), and I set it down where I thought it would look the prettiest.

PREPARE THYSELF, STROGG!

Now, in a perfect world a fellow specialist would have climbed to higher ground, raised his binoculars and called in a strike on the troublesome turret from my proud artillery confabulation. But what actually happened was that I spent so long fiddle-arsing around with my turret that a rival GDF turret must have been constructed elsewhere, meaning that the enemy encampment was long-destroyed, the mobile command point had already stretched out Metroplex Transformer-like and the battle was far progressed.

Resolutely undaunted however, I purloined a nearby Anansi Copter (a

THE STORY SO FAR...

SPLASH DAMAGE



Lift off

The creators of *Quake 3* Fortress team together and go legit – setting up in Bromley, Kent.



2001

More more more!

They start work on a multiplayer contingent to *Wolfenstein* – tinker, tinker, tinker...

2002

Nada, zilch

Wolf: ET emerges as a free game. No-one knows why it's gratis, but no-one complains.

2003



Taxi!

Will plays *Enemy Territory: Quake Wars* and is killed repeatedly. But he's still smiling.

2006



Strogg vehicles look brilliantly organic and insect-like.

Slumming it

Quake Wars shows off deserted urban environments



This town. Is going like a ghost town.

At first we thought it was going to be all deserts, forests, bumps and hillocks – but now the first 'slightly warm, slightly damp, only thing you can buy at 3am' fried chicken shop of multiplayer FPS gaming has been revealed. No details have leaked out of exactly what the urban maps of *Quake Wars* will contain, nor the role of fried chicken shops themselves, but happy memories of guiding tanks through the streets of *Wolfenstein: Enemy Territory* suggest that they'll be pretty intense.

ET: Quake Wars feels as good as it looks, and when it's running it looks bloody amazing too



You can't lay poison out for these cockroaches...

wonderful creation that sits upon the divide between being a rotor-driven hovering machine at low speeds and a jet-powered dogfighter in higher gears), and helped the battle effort by neatly crashing into the walls of the Strogg enclave. It's not even like the flying vehicles are of a *BF2*-level of skill-driven difficulty – I was just having a crap day.

You see, the idea of having the mobile command point set up beyond what was formerly the Strogg Tunnel o' Death was so that missiles could be fired upon the Strogg stronghold's shield – thus leaving the heart of the alien operation open for soldier classes to rush and leave explosives in. The final battle was most definitely on, and *Enemy Territory's* cunning map design and spawn placement meant that I was never far from the action.

Occasions in which you're stranded *Battlefield*-style on the wrong side of the

wrong valley happen rarely, and even when they do you can call in either an airlift of a GDF vehicle from a friendly three-bladed mega-chopper, or a blast from outer-space containing a Strogg one.

NOOB BEHAVIOUR

Eventually, my continual dying, with my body once or twice being ransacked by Strogg medics for vital nutrients, ended in one crap mega-death – when I accidentally stood next to the ticking explosives tied to the Strogg base. My performance had been dismal, my tutor from id remained impassive and I had contributed nothing to the war effort – bar luring an ounce of gunfire away from my more talented team-mates and instead into my soft flesh.

Despite my proud *Wolf: ET* heritage, I proved a noob among noobs – yet my hope for *Quake Wars'* potential for causing an



Strogg fashion sense doesn't go far beyond 'jagged' and 'evil'.

FPS revolution remains undimmed. It feels as good as it looks, and when it's running it looks bloody amazing – just don't expect to be treated with deep understanding and Strogg-sized kid-gloves once in. Unless you're playing against me, that is.

**COMING
SOON...****SPORE****Will Porter sees Will Wright play god as he delivers the run-down on the game of E3**DEVELOPER EA PUBLISHER EA WEBSITE www.spore.com PREVIOUSLY IN... 157As of now, Will Wright has officially made up for *The Sims*.**THE LOWDOWN**

- Mind-bogglingly huge ✓
- Spans all of life ✓
- Beautifully simple in design ✓
- Breathtaking community thinking ✓
- Unlike anything you've ever played ✓

**ETA
Q4**

WILL WRIGHT IS about to make first contact. In a hushed E3 demo room, he's hovering over a moon that lies in orbit around a swirling gas giant, in a solar system light years distant from his own. He lets off a barrage of fireworks over an alien capital city with a message of peace and celebration. Below his UFO, intelligent life bows down and worships. Wright then beams one up for face-to-face talks, a struggling body rising up in his beam of light; only for his mouse-finger to accidentally-on-purpose slip and see the alien freefall back down, ending up as a *Lemmings*-style patch of red on the moon's surface. The natives aren't happy about this, and the air soon bristles with laser blasts. Wright responds with armaments of his own and levels their defences, then nips back into the cosmos, chortling as he goes. Meanwhile, an urgent missive from one of his colonies reports invasion.

It seems a long way from the happy-go-lucky creatures we saw lolling around his home planet a short while ago, when we were being shown the 'David Attenborough' segment of his species' evolution that comes after his life-sim's amoebic one-cell beginnings. Taking

control of one of his multi-legged friends, he dips and dives in and around the nests of rival species, trying to steal food and gain vital DNA points. Then, after a touchy-feely cuddle that represents mating, we're in the creature-creation suite: a playdoh affair that lets you drag-and-drop both vital and aesthetic features onto your creation.

SHUT IT!

When you're initially designing your creature, one sort of mouth will create a race of herbivores, and another more fangy one will spawn a far more flesh-eating variety. When you get into post-mating situations such as this, however, evolution lets you drag-and-drop further tweaks such as go-faster legs or stronger arms that'll help you when the game reaches the tribal era and your species start to use hand-held tools. After this, your new creation will hatch out and the game of life begins anew – with you socialising, hunting, protecting and scampering to your heart's content.

All this is special, very special, but what makes the specialness even more piquant is the way that Wright is melding the powers of the Internet into the fabric of *Spore*. You won't be meeting up with

The Garden Of Eden came with a kit much like this.



other players directly, but every species you come across could have been designed by another player – along with vehicles, buildings and terraformed planets that also come under the span of the *Spore* editing suite. Like the look of another species and you can even tag their creator into a friends list, populating your universe with even more of their content. And it is a universe as well – there are thousands upon thousands of planets that'll be exclusive to your game. Some will need terraforming, some will be like Earth, some will be fundamentally bizarre, but all will be swirling in your own outrageously beautiful galaxy. Game of E3? Potential game of the decade. **PC7**

WHY YOU SHOULD BE EXCITED...

CITY DWELLERS

This looks like being the capital city of the moon's main species, although it could be a colonial outpost of a rival civilisation. Either way, it'll probably be armed by laser defences. Tread carefully.

THE FINAL FRONTIER

This is one of the thousands of inhabited planets you could come across, a moon slowly arcing through space and orbiting an inhospitable gas giant. Are the natives friendly? There's only one way to find out.

ON THE SCALE OF THINGS

A tiny dot just about here represents your UFO. See it? Compare it to the gas giant and then take in the fact that there's an entire galaxy's worth of enormity waiting to be explored. *Spore* is going to make you feel very insignificant indeed.

TOP TRUMPS

When you scan the creatures that dwell here, they get added to your '*Spore*-paedia'; Wright then wants to use the info contained therein as some sort of collectible card game. Nope, we don't know how either.

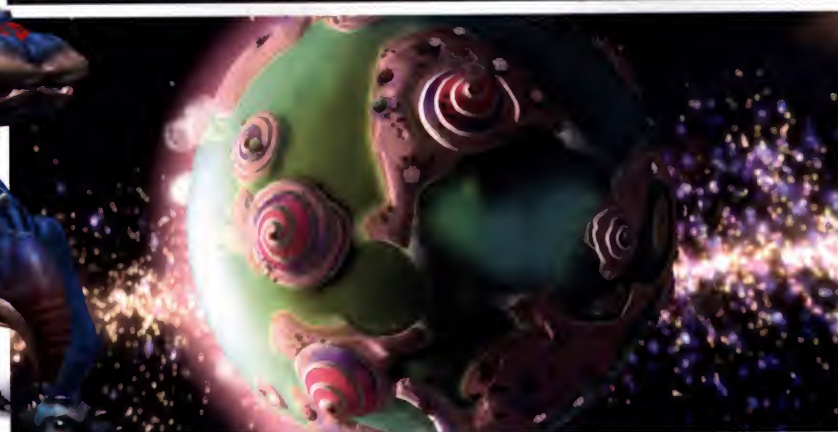
HOWDY STRANGERS


The beauty of *Spore* is that everything from the way this moon has been terraformed to the design of creatures, vehicles and buildings could be a direct reflection of what another *Spore* player is up to somewhere else in the world.



Mighty oaks from tiny acorns grow. Also, intergalactic civilisations of infinite might grow from tiny, stripey creatures with feathers for ears. The evidence is right here.

There are thousands of planets exclusive to you... Is this the game of E3? It's potentially the game of the decade





Sneaky knife kills now earn you your victim's dog-tags.

GO AHEAD, MECH MY DAY...

BATTLEFIELD 2142



At this year's E3, Will Porter got a taste of the future – as well as the bodily odour of loud-shirted Americans...

DEVELOPER DICE PUBLISHER EA WEBSITE www.electronicarts.co.uk/games/8414/ PREVIOUSLY IN... 169

THE LOWDOWN

Gritty future-scape	✓
Neat new Titan game mode	✓
Big stompy robots	✓
Rewards for squad-play	✓
Maps perhaps a little sparse	✗

IHAVE TO say that the concept of *BF2142* didn't fill me with deep love. It seemed a little obvious somehow – a jump of the shark into the realms of its competitors (*UT*, *Quake Wars* et al) that was far removed from the original ethic of its forbears. Initial hands-on impressions didn't help much either. Its bleak, urban feel of a snowy future meant that the whole affair felt quite sparse and featureless, its colour palette well drained of *BF2*'s grime, sand and sun. But then, as so often is the case, my eyes became more fixed and my jaw began to slacken – and I was once more *Battlefield*'s bitch.

As we've previously reported, *Battlefield 2142* is very much the *Battlefield: Vietnam* to *Battlefield 2*'s *Battlefield 1942*. It's not a true sequel, but a heavily tweaked engine-pal – only this time dragging along with it an exciting new game mode and air vehicles that you don't need a paranormal degree of co-ordination to fly.

TITAN QUESTS

My first foray into the Titan mode saw me spawn aboard a massive platform floating above the frosted ruins of a future city – one of the Titans granted to both factions in every bout. The idea runs that players take to bullet-exchanging below the hovering goliaths while attempting to take control of missile silos on the ground – each of which fires off a salvo of death at intervals of two minutes. Missiles are aimed at the Titan of the opposition of whoever is in control of the silo – the ownership of which sways far more wildly than the slow-raising and lowering flags of *BF*-old.

The map I played had three of these silos, and the start of my game very much revolved around their offence and defence. Or it did for everyone else – much of my personal time revolved around constant futuristic death – by mech, by tank and by the knife of a tricky backstabber. The pursuit of the latter, interestingly enough, granting my killer a pair of personal dog-tags – a new medal for the cabinet that DICE are proffering knife-killers, to make braggers on the Internet that much more insanely irritating.

Another new feature, meanwhile, is the way that the game lets you customise your kit on-the-fly – thereby reducing suicide rates map-wide. Once you've unlocked a certain piece of equipment – be it active camouflage for snipers (a *Predator*-style cloak) or a magnetic vehicle mines, you can select and use them instantaneously. Indeed, the whole kit customisation now allows you to branch out far beyond the rigid classes of yore – or at least that's the current masterplan.

I'M NOT VERY GOOD

While I had been busy dying, however, the enemy had knocked out the shields on my Titan – and boarding and conquering was on the agenda. The enemy Titan was manoeuvred into greater proximity (they're not static you see, they can be piloted by the Commander – giving him a much greater battlefield presence) and jet-pods containing solo players and various enemy aircraft began their

Control a missile silo and watch it pulverise the opposition's Titan.



airborne infiltration. I was then cast into a purely defensive role, despite being there, if I'm being honest, more of a human shield capacity than anything more pro-active. In the bowels of the Titan, and feeling more than a little nostalgic for my many months of *PlanetSide* addiction of times past, it was up to us to defend four terminals – the destruction of which would leave the ship's core exposed and enemy victory conditions open for the taking.

Needless to say we lost, failed, choked and bugged it up – there was no Ice-Age endangered land won for the Pan Asian Coalition that day. I did, however, come away with a growing awareness that

ETA
OCT

THE STORY SO FAR...

DIGITAL ILLUSIONS



Enter Pinball

Digital Illusion's first title, *Pinball Dreams*, is released for the Amiga. It was flippin' great.



1992

Enter War

After a run of pinball and motoring titles, the team strike lucky with the magical year 1942.

2002



Enter EA

As is so often the case, EA turn up with a big briefcase and buy the company.

2003

Enter the future

After the success of *BF2*, the future is named as the next stop for the *BF* juggernaut.

2006

Reactor breaches always seem to be on a time delay, don't they?



BF2142 has retained the grit, grime and inanity of its predecessors



a future-set *Battlefield* isn't such an inherently bad thing after all. I mean, I even managed to fly without crashing in flames to the delighted 'lol's of my team-mates – what with the future clearly having provided techno-stabilisers for the flight-inept.

BF2142 isn't some delightfully escapist future jaunt (it doesn't come equipped with jet-powered rocket pants, previously unseen outside the fictional serial 'Robbie Rocket Pants'), and has more than retained the grit, grime and occasional, unintentional, inanity of its predecessors. Count me as converted then. Roll on the 22nd century. **PCZ**

Squad specialities

Squads rewarded for their loving together-ness




Hopefully, while you're defending your Titan's landing pad, another squad will be infiltrating the opposition.

DICE are really pumping up the squad stuff in *BF2142*. Previously, there was never much of a reward when you just said no to the temptation of being a lone shark – but now squads will be equipped with their own deployable spawn points and a fair number of squad-specific goodies. Not least among this number will be a hover drone that squad leaders can unlock – a none too subtle death-giver that automatically fires at nearby targets while your attention is elsewhere.

DISCOVER THE COURAGE THAT TURNS HEROES INTO LEGENDS THIS JUNE.

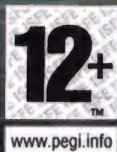


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TITAN QUEST™

FROM AGE OF EMPIRES CO-CREATOR BRIAN SULLIVAN AND BRAVEHEART WRITER RANDALL WALLACE
COMES AN INNOVATIVE, ALL-NEW ACTION RPG SET IN ANCIENT GREECE, EGYPT AND CHINA.

The Titans have escaped their eternal prison, wreaking havoc upon the earth. The gods seek a hero who can turn the tide in an epic struggle that will determine the fate of both men and gods. Unlock arcane mysteries and battle the beasts of mythology as you journey to the Parthenon, the maze at Knossos, the Great Pyramids, the Hanging Gardens of Babylon, and other legendary locales.



WARHAMMER ONLINE: AGE OF RECKONING

**HOT
SHOTS**

DEVELOPER Mythic Entertainment **PUBLISHER** Mythic Entertainment
WEBSITE www.warhammeronline.com **ETA** 2007

WITHOUT A SHADOW of a doubt, the game that we were least expecting to adore at E3 was *Warhammer Online*. Thing is though, there's such a sly British tang given to affairs by Games Workshop's Nottingham heritage, it's hard not to love its drunken giants, silly quests, incessant violence and simply adorably grimy artwork. Even its Orcish maps raise a chuckle with Greenskin scrawlings of 'gud wolf meat here', 'we kill'd dis dragin', 'funny tree' and 'gud smell here'. What's more, Mythic's dedication to Realm vs Realm conflict is truly intriguing. The game is an eye-opener. Look out for our *Warhammer* special next issue.



2

The Bigger Picture

1 SUN BOY RISES

These charming chaps are part of the Greenskin alliance – within which you'll be able to choose avatars from the Orcish and Goblin races. You can also choose to play in the Armies of Order as Dwarf, High Elf or Empire, and as Dark Elf or Chaos for the bad guys.

2 REALMS OF CONTENT

Warhammer is about war – lots of it. So Realm vs Realm combat is high on the agenda. The main battlelines are between Dwarves and Greenskins, Empire and Chaos and the opposing Elven camps. For a race to win, a capital city must be sacked.

3 FITTER, HAPPIER, MORE PRODUCTIVE

As you play and level-up, your character evolves with you – so an Orc will get more and more heavy-set and menacing the more powerful he is. In this way, you'll know who to avoid on the battlefield. Likewise, the more powerful Dwarves will have longer beards.

4 SMELL GUD

Dark humour laces *Age Of Reckoning* – find an NPC Goblin standing alone in the Marshes of Madness complaining he's hungry, and you don't have to gather nuts and berries in the namby-pamby *WOW* fashion. You can just cut off his arm and feed it to him.

5 BRIDGE OF SCYTHES

There's plenty of AI-kicking, but in *Warhammer Online*, PvP is king. From individual 'strangers on a plain' bouts of fisticuffs through to objective-centred in-game battlefields and instanced scenarios, the frontlines are in continual flux; this bridge battle on Mt Bloodhorn is a key point in the campaign.

6 NEVER TOSS A DWARF

Another example of an intriguing PvP scenario sees a battlefield full of dying Dwarven warriors. It's up to the Dwarves to rush in and save them by providing refreshing flagons of ale, then the Greenskins to run in, finish the job and lop off beards as trophies.

7 MONSTER HANGOVER

Mythic are going all out to avoid the usual 'fetch me five pieces of monster gut' quest dynamics. One quest currently on show has fellow Greenskins gathering alcohol to get a giant pissed, and then watching him stumble into Dwarf territory killing all he meets.

8 SPOILS OF WAR

As you can see, *Warhammer* is all about destruction and battle. As such, fans of girly-swot-swot PvE and prancing around forests looking for balls of flax aren't really being catered for. *Warhammer Online* is all about bloody battle, mingled with a fair amount of heavy drinking and rude stories about the opposition's mothers.



PCZONE CHARTS

ChartTrack

- 1 **NEW** **HEROES OF MIGHT & MAGIC V**
Issue 169 80%
- 2 **↓** **GUILD WARS: FACTIONS**
Issue 169 78%
- 3 **↑** **CHAMPIONSHIP MANAGER 2006**
Issue 167 69%
- 4 **↓** **THE SIMS 2: OPEN FOR BUSINESS**
Issue 166 72%
- 5 **↓** **GHOST RECON: ADVANCED WARFIGHTER**
Issue 169 90%
- 6 **—** **THE SIMS 2**
Issue 147 82%
- 7 **↓** **THE ELDER SCROLLS IV: OBLIVION**
Issue 167 95%
- 8 **—** **FOOTBALL MANAGER 2006**
Issue 162 90%
- 9 **↓** **WORLD OF WARCRAFT**
Issue 152 95%
- 10 **NEW** **2006 FIFA WORLD CUP**
Issue 169 78%
- 11 **↑** **AGE OF EMPIRES III**
Issue 162 84%
- 12 **↓** **LOTR: THE BATTLE FOR MIDDLE-EARTH II**
Issue 167 71%
- 13 **↑** **ROME: TOTAL WAR - GOLD EDITION**
Issue 148 93%
- 14 **↑** **STAR WARS: EMPIRE AT WAR**
Issue 166 85%
- 15 **↓** **TOMB RAIDER: LEGEND**
Issue 168 81%
- 16 **↓** **BATTLEFIELD 2**
Issue 157 94%
- 17 **↓** **THE SIMS 2: NIGHTLIFE**
Issue 161 58%
- 18 **↓** **CSI: 3 DIMENSIONS OF MURDER**
Issue 169 62%
- 19 **↓** **BLACK & WHITE 2**
Issue 161 93%
- 20 **NEW** **THE DA VINCI CODE**
Issue 170 61%



1 **HEROES OF MIGHT & MAGIC V**

Who knew there were so many covert *HOMM* fans lurking in the UK? 'Could it be magic?' asked Barry Manilow. Seems like it can be.



10 **2006 FIFA WORLD CUP**

Crikey. An EA football game we don't instinctively hate? Amazingly, it seems it can be done. We'll wait for next time.



2 **THE ELDER SCROLLS IV: OBLIVION**

The hours being fed into Bethesda's *Oblivion* are now worrying certain government watchdogs. Still great.



20 **THE DA VINCI CODE**

A badly written (but mildly interesting) book. A shit film. A poorly-charting game. It's not exactly a difficult code to break is it?

Elveon is an Unreal 3-powered actionfest, with 50% more elf than ever before.



Elves aren't all wispy and mystical. Some are dead hard.

ELVELATION

Pointy-eared emotionless nature lovers finally get their own game

www2.elveon.net | ETA: 2007

DEEP IN THE heart of E3's smallest, least renowned hall there lay a thing of beauty. For once though, we're not talking about the man who'd been dressed up in silver to advertise *Chrome 2*, nor a somewhat vacant booth babe in a latex suit handing out flyers, but rather a stunning-looking game called *Elveon*. Driven by the Unreal 3 engine, *Elveon* is an action-RPG set during the age of the elves and charts the climax of an ancient war between a legendary elvish champion and a living god.

Still over a year from completion, *Elveon* is already looking impressive. The visceral yet considered melee combat feels bone-jarringly realistic thanks to the use of real martial artists to motion-capture every attack, thrust and parry. "We've developed an elvish combat style, which is a mix of medieval combat and martial arts, and we're doing all of the motion-capturing with real weapons," explains Slavo Hazucha, MD of 10tacle's Slovakian studio.

Armed with an arsenal of weapons including bows, spears and swords, you must embark on your epic quest while

fending off a cornucopia of enemies, in encounters requiring skill, timing, combo mastery and the ability to effectively block and counter attacks.

"We've already spent a year working on the AI and will keep working on it till the game ships," explains Hazucha. "Enemies will act intelligently to your attacks. If you're facing multiple opponents, they'll try to surround you and if you keep using the same attacks, they'll learn and start blocking them more easily. *Elveon* isn't a button-mashing game or a simple clickfest like many other RPGs. The combat is complex and skill-based. The AI learns the way you fight."

Shipping on PC and Xbox 360, 10tacle is taking the almost unprecedented step of bolstering the game for PC players, adding in a multitude of extra RPG features to create additional depth and immersion for PC owners. Add to that dynamic day/night and weather cycles, some of the most realistic scenery around and even gargantuan dragons to battle and it's all too easy to get excited about it. Not least because it has elves in. And elves are sexy.

EVERYBODY WAS KUNG FU ROLE-PLAYING

A thankfully unjaded Andy Robinson trumpets the PC arrival of *Jade Empire*

Jade.bioware.com | ETA: 2006

ONE OF OUR favourite RPGs of recent times is still *Knights Of The Old Republic*. Not just because it has wookiees and lightsabers (although that does help), but because it's an expertly webbed together role-playing game, with an excellent combat system and a story that stands a Peter Mayhew-sized head and shoulders over the prequels.

Just imagine our excitement, then, when we were whisked off to a dark and dingy area of BioWare's E3 booth to see *Jade Empire*, *KOTOR*'s stellar console development buddy that's now on its way to PC.

Jade Empire, in case you didn't know, was originally released for Microsoft's friendly lounge occupier the Xbox last year, and bartered quite a lot of critical acclaim that wasn't necessarily translated into heavy sales figures. Putting sci-fi shenanigans on the shelf, BioWare had adopted a new oriental guise for its latest RPG, loosely based on Chinese legend. Unsurprisingly then, for the PC release you can expect a plot full of philosophy, revenge, plenty of kung fu scuffles but, unfortunately, no dodgy dubbed voice-acting.

Now that the console shackles have been liberally broken from the project's ankles, *Jade Empire* is getting a similar treatment to *KOTOR* in its jump over to PC. You can expect a new star-spangled interface, a bag of graphical tweaks and

just a smidgen of extra content to beckon over the console crowd, which includes new fighting styles, monsters and a new character. In keeping with the martial arts theme, *Jade Empire* sports a fairly novel real-time battle system. Press a mouse or keyboard button and your character will directly perform an attack. There's a basic light attack, a slow but unblockable heavy attack, your standard block and all the Jackie Chan jumping moves you'll ever need.

The game itself is full of the deep character interaction and plot twists we've come to expect from BioWare. You'll find no homicidal C3 units this time around, but your party will eventually fill with a variety of entertaining characters including a big, bulking assassin called The Black Whirlwind and even a booze-swigging drunken master. Among the fantastically voice-acted characters, you'll even spot a star or two; in the PC demonstration we were given, we spotted Firefly's Nathan Fillion (Captain Reynolds) in the role of a baddie. Apparently, Fillion is a close friend and neighbour of BioWare, and voice-acted for *Jade Empire* as a favour. Bless his little space pirate socks.

Given our rabid and undying love for *Knights Of The Old Republic* – plus the impressive collection of awards the console version has already collected – we're keeping our eyes on *Jade Empire*. Watching, always watching.

Those cats were fast at rat-slaying.



In fact it was a little bit nerve-fraying.



Big trouble in little China.



Lanterns = exotic.




Buddhist bridges are best.



"What a piece of junk!"



EMPIRES RISE AND FALL

- 
- ▶ HEROIC MÊLÉE COMBAT
 - ▶ COMMAND MASSIVE BATTLEFIELD FORMATIONS
 - ▶ BOARD & CAPTURE ENEMY VESSELS AT SEA
 - ▶ SIEGE & COUNTER SIEGE CITIES
 - ▶ MULTIPLAYER MATCHMAKING OR SKIRMISH MODES



ENTER THE FRAY IN
HERO COMMAND MODE



DEFEAT RIVAL FLEETS IN
DRAMATIC NAVAL BATTLES



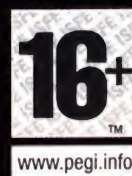
CONQUER IN MULTI OR
SINGLE-PLAYER MODES

BUT HEROES LIVE FOREVER



RISE & FALL

CIVILIZATIONS AT WAR™





PARDO!

WHAT'S YOUR GAME?

Martin Korda goes on a Burning Crusade to find Rob Pardo and the latest on World Of Warcraft's first expansion pack

Who are ya?



NAME Rob Pardo

DEVELOPER Blizzard

POSITION Vice-president of game design

AGE Erm...

GAMES WORKED ON BEFORE *Warcraft III, Warcraft III: The Frozen Throne, StarCraft, StarCraft: Brood War, World Of Warcraft*

FAVOURITE GAME *Civilization*

FIRST GAME WORKED ON *Descent*



Q So just to remind slower readers, what can we expect to find through the dark portal in *The Burning Crusade*?

A "The land beyond the dark portal is the world from which the orcs originate. The Burning Legion invaded it and as a result, it's a patchwork world. Some sections are torn up by the Dark Legion's magic, while other areas still survive as they were. From a gameplay side, you'll see more of what you'd expect from *WOW*. We're really trying to give each zone its own story, quests and game mechanics."

What can you tell us about the new race you're introducing today?

"The Draenai are the new Alliance race and can heal a target over time. They also get shadow resistance, have a bonus for the jewel-crafting skill and have an ability called 'heroic presence', which gives everyone within their group a +1% hit bonus."

"Already revealed are the Blood Elves, the Horde race that have the ability to drain mana from their enemies. They also have a bonus to their enchanting ability."

And the new level cap is still 70?

"Yes. One problem we had while balancing the original game from levels 1-60 was trying to match the amount of experience needed against the amount of quest content that we had. At one point, it took too long to go up levels and you ended up just attacking monsters to gain experience. In *Burning Crusade*, we want you to be able to gain experience through quests."

So can you tell us what kind of game experience we can expect between levels 60-70?

"From levels 60-70, a lot of the outdoor content will be similar to the content between levels 50-60. It'll probably be more involved, but it'll still be a combination of solo, group and duo content. All the instances from 60-70 will be five-man instances."

How are you handling PvP in the latest expansion?

"We have a lot of plans for *The Burning Crusade*'s PvP, one of which is all the outdoor PvP. We're trying to give you genuine reasons to want to control outdoor zones. If you control a zone, a new town, graveyard or flight path will open up for you."

What's your favourite bit from *The Burning Crusade* then?

"Flying mounts. We were hoping to get them into the original, but due to the way we made the content and the technology, we couldn't. However, this time we've been able to put in the likes of flying griffins."

We've heard that you started your career as a games tester. Did it give you a good grounding in development?

"As a game designer, I think that the more jobs you've experienced in game development, the better. A lot of what makes me effective as a game designer is understanding the technology or the game-testing process behind the game."

What's your opinion on gamers who dedicate their lives to MMOs or turn them into real-life careers?



The Draenai's spaceship crashlanded because of the Blood Elves. So they're not best mates.

"An MMO is more like a TV series than a movie. We'll keep making content and new mechanics until the audience is done with it"



Sunstrider Isle: an ideal holiday destination.



"Take that, small girl!"

"Playing an MMO is similar to any sort of hobby. Some people will spend a lot more time doing it than other people. In terms of players selling virtual property for real money, I think it has a detrimental effect on other players' enjoyment."

Isn't there a threat that an offline class system will appear where the rich can afford +3002 swords, while poorer players are left to defend themselves with sharp pieces of bark?

"We don't agree with players buying *WOW* items offline for real money. We want everyone to start equal, no matter who they are in real life. There

is, of course, the threat that gamers who are richer outside of the game could benefit more from this kind of trading, and that's why we penalise anyone we find doing it."

What does the future hold for *World Of Warcraft*?

"Many games try to be like movies. An MMO is more like a TV series than a movie. I think we're going to keep making content and new mechanics and when the audience is done with it, we'll know it's time to move on to something else."

You're probably safe for quite a while yet then. **PARD**



ROB PARDO

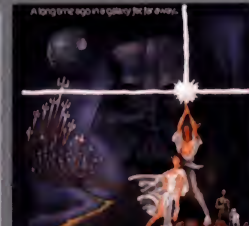
Where he turns for inspiration...



CIVILIZATION: Meier's easy-to-learn yet difficult-to-master classic influenced Rob's game designs.



TOLKIEN: *The Lord Of The Rings* was one of many fantasy books that inspired Rob's projects.



STAR WARS: A NEW HOPE: It was the reason Rob went into game designing rather than law.

THE MAN WHO KNOWS



Stringent security forces were present at this year's E3 – their main area of concern not being terrorism, nor illicit drug-taking, but the **rude areas of girls**. To this end, Uncle Sam ensured crack teams of **nude-police** were patrolling the aisles – their job to seek out **illicit bikini bottoms** threatening to **corrupt the gaming industry** and cause huge tailbacks and flash-wielding people-jams in the wayfares of E3. A job perhaps created by god himself in the high heavens perhaps – but one not apparently enjoyed by the naughtiness patrol; a collection of **sour-faced crones** employed to deal with the **nascent camel-toe threat**.

A group of **sexy vigilantes** (widely seen as the best sort of vigilante) set up a **protest** outside the Convention Center. Bearing placards with slogans such as 'Booth Babe Protest: I'm Rated E For Everyone' and '**Bikinis > Bullets**', the titillating trio desperately fought the system the only way they knew how: standing around and smiling lots. Sadly, it was later revealed that the protest was nothing but a **conniving sham** to advertise an **E3 aftershow party** and not at all, as previously thought, anything to do with sexy ladies who actively and desperately want to stand around waving their **boobs** about for no fiscal gain whatsoever. It's a sad, sad world we live in.

Fatefully, however, news of the banning of **braindead** and **largely talentless bimbos** only known through occasional appearances in **illicit grumble videos** had not reached the ears of **acclaimed socialite Paris Hilton**. Who would have been appalled. "I'm really excited to have my new videogame... *Diamond Quest!*" stated the leggy stunner as she turned up to advertise her mobile phone puzzler **Paris Hilton's Jewel Jam**, while ten PR executives mimed shooting themselves behind her.

"Thankfully, news of the E3 banning of talentless bimbos only known through occasional appearances in grumble videos had not reached the ears of acclaimed socialite Paris Hilton"



Best cowboy shooter since LucasArts' *Outlaws*?



Indians: no longer a minority in PC gaming.



"And then they all lived happily ever after. Apart from you – who was dead."

HEED THE CALL

"Could you answer that? I think it might be Juarez..." Yes it is, it's the *Call Of Juarez*

www.callofjuarez.com | ETA: 2006

ANYONE WHO'S EVER seen Ian 'Lovejoy' McShane abandoning his previous career as a cheeky antiques dealer by stamping on a prostitute's neck and saying the 'c' word in *Deadwood*, will be aware that the Wild West wasn't particularly pleasant. Neither is Reverend Ray, the apparently 'reformed' lead character in the upcoming Western-themed shooter, *Call Of Juarez*. Based in that wilder kind of west you may recognise from '80s films (before it all became a bit of a laugh), Ray's a reformed killer who's given up a 40-a-day murder habit to become an evangelising old curmudgeon.

Inevitably, however, Ray realises that it's his god-given duty to take up arms and rid the world of the scum that killed his brother, but it's a sweetly disturbing touch that his *Bible* remains permanently mapped as a weapon. You can carry two weapons at

once, so this means you can shoot people in the face while tapping at the mouse and actually quoting *The Bible* while you fight. Any serial-killers reading? Get ready for the first empathic treatment of your condition.

Balancing the play styles, you also control Billy, a young rebel, whose tutelage with a Native Indian leads him to rely more on his bow and arrow, whip and stealth tactics. His training level even has him running around a huge untamed landscape killing rabbits with a bow. The *Juarez* developers are earnest about the seriousness of this Wild West experience, so don't expect knowing asides or the farting cowboys from *Blazing Saddles*. We've only seen two small levels, but it seems pleasant enough. Whether the full game will make us fill our chaps with game gravy, however, remains to be seen...

IN THE SPOTLIGHT:



The man who directs Sam Fisher

HUGUES MARTEL - SEQUENCE DIRECTOR ON *SPLINTER CELL: DOUBLE AGENT*

Hugues Martel started his career in the traditional animation industry and his work includes animating on the highly acclaimed *Triplets Of Belleville*. After making the jump to games when storyboarding *Prince Of Persia: The Sands Of Time*, Martel is currently finishing up *Splinter Cell: Double Agent's* directed sequences.

How did you get into animation?

"I was studying illustration and I had a miserable time learning graphics because the teachers didn't believe people could illustrate and get money for it. I have a friend that quit the programme and got hired in an animation studio; he was very talented. He eventually got a promotion and called me one night. I thought only Disney did animation, but I gave it a go, brought my portfolio and got the job. Since then I've done pretty much everything in traditional animation, from painting backgrounds to visual development, character design and storyboarding."

How did you make the jump from traditional illustration to games?

"I had a friend who called me from the videogame industry - a genius kid who I had given a job to. He called me and said: 'I'm a director at Ubisoft now and I could do with some help storyboarding some *Prince Of Persia* things. Are you interested?' I'd never really done storyboards for this kind of stuff - never drawing humans, I'd always done cartoons. When I came here, I knew nothing about computers - my experience up to then was that I'd worked on a movie called

Triplets Of Belleville, and that was my first animation job. When I was offered the *Prince Of Persia* stuff it was a very hard decision to make, but I feel that games have more potential."

Do you think games are beginning to rival traditional animation?

"They're not there yet and they're not taken seriously, either. I'm hoping that little by little we can convince producers and the industry to buy into it. It's a very risky thing because it's a big investment; just making those small moments in *Double Agent* are extremely costly and not necessarily super-fun to play."

Do you think games have more storytelling potential?

"It's not about storytelling, it's about involving the person that's watching or playing your game. I think we have total freedom and we're just at the birth of it. I'm very excited but I'm also very disappointed; the engines are often unstable and we can never do what we think of easily. It's a real challenge. It's scary and I don't know if the industry will make it, but I sure would love to at least be trying."

Sam Fisher is now more animated than ever before.



Shanghai: as featured in Mission: Impossible III.



LIVING IN A MATERIAL WORLD

Clearing the gaming tat from our desks in ways the cleaner never could...

We live in prosperous times here at ZONE towers. Having returned from E3 - the holy Mecca of videogame tat - Will's desk is absolutely swimming in T-shirts, inflatable toys and temporary tattoos. But while we'd love to keep a hold of this fine selection of obese-gamer T-shirts, we're going to put them on eBay so that the children of the Internet can billboard the latest game from almighty game publishers. Look for our eBay tag PCZoners - we'll be waiting for you...

Buy our tat at www.ebay.co.uk
All proceeds go to charity, mate...
www.entertainmentsoftwarecharity.org.uk



THIS MONTH'S TAT



FRONTLINES SQUISHY BARREL
We want to love and squeeze it all day long.



MARK OF CHAOS TEMPORARY TATTOOS
You'll be the coolest nerd in the Games Workshop.



BIOSHOCK T-SHIRT
Says 'Would you?' on the front. We would.



HELLGATE: LONDON COMIC
So gripping they based a game on it.

THE TAT BOARD

COMPARE	ITEM TITLE	SOLD FOR	BIDS
	EIGHT HEROES OF ANNIHILATED EMPIRES BOOKMARKS That's 52.375p per bookmark! What a bargain! What a Ukrainian RTS steal!	£4.19	6
	SUPREME COMMANDER T-SHIRT It was one of the games of E3, so now a lucky chap can wear a big stompy robot with pride.	£11.50	5
	ASUS BUSINESS CARD HOLDER Adorned with northern Sefton's name, we were lucky that this hadn't been pawned to pay for flat caps and coal.	£5.50	2
	CHICAGO 1930 HIPFLASK Twenty-six pounds? Yet again the tradition of alcohol containers going for the most money is maintained.	£26.00	9

THE PROFESSIONALS

Uncovering the lies and slander perpetuated by PC gaming

THIS IS THE one, game/life dichotomy fans. If The Professionals ever had a *raison d'être*, then it was Will Porter's half-indignant, half-baffled cries that barrels just "wouldn't do that if you shot them," and no, "not even if you did it with a shotgun." That's why that flammable *Half-Life*

barrel appears in the bottom-right corner of this page: it's a symbol of naïve confusion and bitter anger that comes when you first find out that grown-ups sometimes tell lies. And that barrel – and the long history of heart-breaking mendacity it represents – is going to have to answer to Jon Reardon...

**THIS MONTH:
EXPLODING
BARRELS**

Expert: Jon Reardon
Job: Production manager Company: Rye Oil Ltd
Expert Pedantry: Barrels in PC (and early arcade) gaming



DOOM

"We have *Doom* to blame for FPSXBS (first-person shooter exploding barrel syndrome). One shot from a handgun jolts the barrel backwards the second shot explodes it. I very much doubt that

this could happen. There's a small chance that the second bullet could cause a spark and set the barrel off, but it's unlikely... Maybe if they contained a light spirit such as petroleum or acetone – these have highly flammable vapours, so any spark may cause an explosion. But unlike real life, the barrels aren't labelled, so we can't tell."

PCZONE



These barrels lie



HALF-LIFE 2

"The barrels look fantastic here, almost picture-perfect right down to the flammable stickers and the rust marks. The general physics and the way they move is pretty good, though barrels should still not explode when shot with the gravity gun – the impact alone wouldn't create a source of ignition. The way they fly through the air and bounce is very realistic, but is also more in keeping with empty barrels than full ones. And if they're empty, what's exploding?"

PCZONE



Beautiful but hollow



FAR CRY

"In *Far Cry*, barrels are pushed – much more realistic than *Half-Life*, especially if the barrels are full. Another great feature is the way barrels are used as weapons. The rolling of a barrel down a slope would certainly do serious harm to any individual hit by it. The average barrel of oil weighs close to 200 kilos (about 31.5 stone in old money). For feel, realistic design and behaviour, and general usage, *Far Cry* just steals it from *Half-Life*."

PCZONE



Roll out the barrels



OBLIVION

"I think IKEA may have some competition. The coopers of Cyrodill have come up with the perfect storage solution. The barrels look great, and would be a fine addition to any home or

hovel. But the greatest thing about these barrels is the sheer storage capacity. You can store anything in them, and in any amount – and people use them to store some right old tat. However, they don't seem to have any physical effect in the environment. You can't move them or stack them (surely the point of barrels is that they are portable?), though you can stand on them. A great barrel, but ruined by impossible Tardis-like behaviour."

PCZONE



Barrels are finite, sir



**HONOURABLE
MENTION**

DONKEY KONG

"The granddaddy of in-game barrel tomfoolery. There's not too much I can say about the graphics – detailed barrel modelling was quite hard to achieve with the arcade technology of 1981. The sound of the barrels rolling is surprisingly accurate, although they do sound empty, which at worst, is going to give our intrepid plumber a sore shin. The problems start to occur when the barrels roll down the vertical ladders, and worse still, burst into flames at the bottom then start to roll back up the ladders. Still, for a game where you have a gorilla chucking barrels at an Italian plumber, you can't complain."

PCZONE



Flimsy cooper whimsy

WINNER: Far Cry

Far Cry's respectful barrel design and nod towards the sheer weight of these steely whoppers gives Crytek their most important award to date.

ARE YOU A PROFESSIONAL?

PC ZONE is in search of readers with professional knowledge or anally-retentive knowledge in the following fields, and many more:

*Spacial Anomalies *Portable Light Sources *Crates *Locksmithery *Burglary
*Psychological Manias

If you want to cast your eye over these or any other PC gaming areas, then email us at TheProfessionals@pczone.co.uk and stick your oar in as far as it'll go.



STALKER: "I'M NOT DEAD"

"I feel happyyy!" adds long-lost Ukrainian shooter as it staggers in from the cold

www.stalker-game.com | Q1 2007 (they say)

SEVERAL AEONS AGO, a game was announced that was revolutionary in its aims: a completely AI-driven world in which the player was forced to survive in a radiation-saturated wilderness. In *STALKER: Shadow Of Chernobyl*, you would be competing against and befriending groups of rival irradiated treasure hunters, battling the patrolling military and keeping an eye out for the herds of animals obeying only instinct and a certain amount of bloodlust. It sounded amazing. Thing is, though it turned out amazing it wasn't much fun.

"Originally, GSC intended to have this complete open-ended architecture for all the AI – but it just didn't work," explains THQ's Dean Sharpe – the man helicoptered into Ukrainian developers GSC Gameworld to bang rulers on tables and glare at developers chewing gum or passing notes to each other beneath tables. "Originally, it was just all organic – and it didn't work."

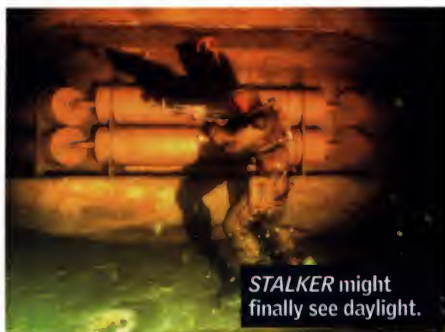
To demonstrate *STALKER*'s current state, a battle was booted up that may or may not

appear in the final game – a scripted situation in an industrial fort that you might come across as you wander through the (still AI-driven) wilds. This battle saw one faction of friendly stalkers asking you for help to rescue one of their number from the military – the battle for whom is still very much an AI-driven affair. Sometimes the armed forces win, sometimes the stalkers win; in the exclusive run-through we saw, the hostage actually ended up dead. Once the scripted situation was over, we were then told, the organic AI takes residence in the area – *Chernobyl*'s menagerie get to roam free once more.

Elsewhere, some mutants have hit the cutting-room floor, survival aspects such as sleeping and eating have (unfortunately) been canned, and reams of needless dialogue have been scissored – all for the good of the Q1 2007 release date. A date delivered with a steely glare of certainty from THQ man Sharpe. We've heard that one before, but sweet Jesus, it's got to come out at some point. Doesn't it?



The engine's getting old, but it still looks pretty.



STALKER might finally see daylight.



Goodbye AI, hello semi-scripting.



Dear Will,

I am very sneaky. As such, I chose to play as a thief in *Oblivion*. So after rocketing through 15 levels having only killed the odd shopkeeper in a flurried panic, my sneaking skills are top-notch – but I'm cack-handed when it comes to fighting. Now I'm getting bitten to death by rats. Why?!
Steve Hogarty

Dear Steve,

I take it that you've got a problem with the now infamous levelling system in *Oblivion* – and you're mildly perturbed by creatures beefing themselves up backstage. It's a dangerous land is Cyrodiil, and I find anyone who sticks all their attributes into non-combat abilities misguided. You've just got to learn balance – it's clear from the start that there's a tilt on the action in *Oblivion*, so why can't you just prepare for it?
Will Porter

Dear Will,

What's the point of levelling up at all if everybody else gets stronger? I go on epic quests over thousands of miles through forests and caverns to earn experience – where do the rats get the levels? They're not going on quests to save the world – I am. They should be crushed under my mighty questing foot! It's not fun, and it doesn't feel like progress.
SH

Dear Steve,

Oblivion works in a bit of a different way to *Morrowind* and most other RPGs. When I want to gain the advantage, I make sure I've got good armour and a kickass enchanted sword – that's the way it works now. More quests: better equipment. And so what if the game stays challenging?
WP

Dear Will,

Better equipment? How am I supposed to get better equipment when chests are guarded by ferocious rats or fairies? I always like playing as a thief in RPGs, but *Oblivion*'s thieves are broken. The game demands you know how to use a sword, but lets you swan into its vast world with blade skills on a par with a 60-year-old woman.
SH

Dear Steve,

I'd love an option where you could talk round the end boss, in the way I did back in *Fallout*. But to an extent you have to play *Oblivion* the way it wants to be played. It's not *Morrowind 2*: it's its own game.
WP

Dear Will,

Wrong. The fact that you're still employed here baffles me.
SH

Just nobody mention
Star Trek: Nemesis. OK?

IT'S WORSE THAN THAT... HE'S DEAD JIM!

STAR TREK: LEGACY

Jon Blyth exceeds his Enterprise allowance in the game that stars them all

DEVELOPER Mad Doc Software PUBLISHER Bethesda (US) WEBSITE www.maddocsoftware.com PREVIOUSLY IN... N/A

THE LOWDOWN

Space. The final frontier...	✓
These are the voyages of each Starship Enterprise...	✓
They have a continuing mission...	✓
To fight next to strange new worlds...	✓
To seek out and destroy new life and new civilisations	✓
Doubtful that Marina Sirtis will feature	✗

THE EVEN-NUMBERED rule is a cliché among anyone with even a vague knowledge of the *Star Trek* films. It can be paraphrased thus – the odd-numbered films do the same for your sense of *Trek* devotion as having William Shatner break into your house, slap your dog and empty a sack of vipers into the cutlery drawer.

If this is the case for the games, Mad Doc Software have some encouraging form. *Armada* was a fine, playable RTS that gave fans a great Borg storyline. Then they released *Armada II* – a disappointingly samey rehash of the first. Following the good-bad rule, *Star Trek: Legacy* should be great. And when you consider the E3 presentation, which evoked the classic *Wrath Of Khan*, you're carrying one excited basket of chaps.

Legacy has a pretty adventurous selling point, that'll have the more outdoors-wary among us howling and slaving in a way that would cause a vicar to shuffle awkwardly in his chair. *Legacy* starts you off in the 22nd century and spans centuries, encompassing every *Star Trek* era there's ever been. Ever. There's an epic, over-arching plot – and that's some arch, mister – that carries you through all the technological developments, all the Enterprises, all the Deep Space Nines, all the Voyagers and all the dinky Defiants.

KLINGONS ON THE...

So how do you get all that in? Dr Ian Lane Davis, the Doc from Mad Doc Software, explains. "You'll see the history of the series

from the beginning, and move through the evolution chronologically. The three separate eras are continuous in terms of both the storyline and the fleet that you carry into battle each mission."

Streamlining a timeline that's grown so organically must be a Herculean task, especially when a good proportion of the fans would be furious, say, if the Defiant appeared before 2366. But that's not the only problem; the set designers of *Enterprise*, the prequel series, couldn't bring themselves to make the ships look less futuristic than the '60s classic, which was supposed to be built nearly a century later. How will that affect the game's design?

"The designs have evolved a little bit since the retro *Star Trek*, but a good deal of that retro feeling comes from the older production techniques and models they used, back in the day," explains Dr Davis. "In *Legacy*, the ships look really good across all the eras. Kirk's ship has never looked better."

STARBOARD BOW

You've got to admire the bare-faced balls of someone who's dared to improve the slinky clunk of the classic NCC-1701. But what will combat be like? Point, click, phasers? The static lasers-on, lasers-off battles of the TV series, with an occasional manoeuvre named after someone they just made up? Will it be about diverting power to shields? "We don't plan on making the

ETA
Q3

THE STORY SO FAR...

MAD DOC SOFTWARE

ODD GP

The studio is founded by Dr Ian Davis, whose insanity gave the company its name.

1999



TIP TO TREK

Mad Doc dip their techy toes into the licence with *Star Trek: Armada*. It's great.

2000



CONQUEST

Empire Earth II is kicked out the door. It's good, but doesn't feature tachyon fields.

2005

ENTERPRISING

Star Trek: Legacy is prepped for warp. It's good, and does feature tachyon fields.

2006

Look! The Defiant!

Hide in the tachyon ion field thingie!

All aboard

Mad Doc add a dose of personality to hulking lumps of floating metal



The final frontier has never been so pretty.

Bethesda are publishing, and Patrick Stewart voiced Uriel Septim in *Oblivion*, so we can probably bank on some authentic Picard vocals. They're in the process of signing up the others, but that's a ruddy big space-time orchard to be scrumping, so no definite news yet. As for the ships, there are 60 craft in the game – ranging from scout ships to whacking great buggers that could eclipse Leeds. Victories lead to command points, and what do points make? Ship customisation and improved attributes for your craft and captain, that's what. It's not as catchy as 'prizes', but it's more useful when your hull integrity's at 60%.

Borg architects don't get paid much. Hence the lack of curves.


player feel like they're micro-managing their individual ships too much. *Legacy* is all about sexy space combat. There's nothing static about these battles; think tactical movements, ships getting torn apart, chases, running battles and of course, big, sexy explosions."

From other gameplay on show at E3 – a gigantic battle around Deep Space Nine between Klingons and Romulans, with a side helping of the Federation coming to the rescue that was cut short by the appearance of a flotilla of gigantic Borg cubes – the doctor is living up to this promise. What's more, each of the above will be playable in multiplayer – if you have a pressing need to assimilate someone – and skirmish battles taken liberally from *Star Trek* history will be available. So don't count out Wolf 359.


So, it's time to ask that question. The question that tests the mettle and reserve of anyone with a love for Roddenbury's massive baby. The question about *TNG*'s very own Ensign Scrappy Doo. Were you ever a reader of alt.wesley.crusher.die.die.die?

"*Star Trek* has very grown-up themes of humanity, politics and personal drama, and the story is best told by characters who have a firm identity. If the character is young and constantly changing, it's harder to portray the changes and conflicts in the drama." Oh, Dr Davis. Spoken like a true Vulcan diplomat. **PCZ**

All we need now is a sexy Vulcan in a decontamination chamber.



You'll battle dusk,
noon and night.



Dust: the asthmatic foot
soldier's worst nightmare.

ONCE MORE UNTO THE BREACH...



MEDIEVAL 2: TOTAL WAR

Martin Korda has the latest info on this epic RTS drummed into him at E3

DEVELOPER The Creative Assembly PUBLISHER Sega WEBSITE www.totalwar.com PREVIOUSLY IN... 165

THE LOWDOWN

Even larger and more detailed battles than previous *Total War* games



This time you can invade the Americas



Looks so good you'll be running your tongue over your monitor



More of everything we loved from the previous games and countless new features, too



No Knights of the Round Table



ETA
Q4

BASTARD NCISOFT DRUMMER boys! I'm sitting here at the world's largest games convention about to see one of the highlights of E3 2006, and all I can hear is the incessant poundings of a bunch of music student hippies hired by NCsoft to piss off anyone within a 30-mile radius of their stand.

Still, it could be worse. The Creative Assembly's Ian Roxburgh and Mark Sutherns have been sitting next to these beat boys for the past two days, so much so that they've perfected the art of presenting *Medieval 2* at a volume rivaling a pneumatic drill.

It's been just five months since we broke the news that the *Total War* family was soon to have a fourth arrival, but with Roxburgh and Sutherns in the mood to extol the virtues of their game, it's immediately apparent that they're keen to spill enough *Medieval 2* beans to cover almost three pieces of toast.

"Everything is bigger and better than *Rome*," yells Roxburgh as he begins his presentation. "The battles have double the

polygons, each troop is unique and there are numerous combat variations with thrusts, parries and fatality moves. We've also doubled the textures on the campaign map, and there are twice as many voiceovers and sound effects. We've even ensured that each nation has the correct accent."

SHOUT IT OUT

Roxburgh zooms into the campaign map, which radiates a refined clarity and depth of detail when compared to *Rome's* worldview. But the strategic map's enhancements run far deeper than cosmetics. "We're adding loads of new features," he bellows. "Click on any faction on the map and it'll give you a voiceover that reflects how it feels towards you. If a nation is amenable to you, they'll greet you, while a hostile nation will be far more aggressive. You'll no longer have to use the Diplomacy screen to find out how a nation feels."

While *Total War* has been at the forefront of strategic innovation for the

best part of six years now, one area that's lacked depth has been diplomacy, a failing that the team are keen to rectify. "We've spent a lot of time improving diplomacy," screams Roxburgh, as blood begins to seep from my eardrums.

"In *Medieval 2*, the AI will not only remember previous dealings you've had with it but your dealings with other factions, too. It'll then base its stance towards you on all of those factors."

Another new addition to the strategic map are princesses – pawns that can be used in a variety of underhand ways. Little more than whores in expensive garbs, these harlot diplomats can be prostituted to make alliances with rival factions (through arranged marriages), or sent to seduce enemy generals to your cause.

While we're on the subject of generals... "Each general's personality will have different effects on the battlefield or within cities," roars Roxburgh. "A general's attributes can

THE STORY SO FAR...

THE CREATIVE ASSEMBLY



CONVERTED

The company begins life by converting games from other platforms to the PC.



1987

IT'S IN THE GAME

The studio teams up with EA and converts FIFA International Soccer to the PC.



1994

MILLENNIUM

Shogun: Total War is released, a game that propels the company into the big time.



2000

SEGA

After almost 20 years of independence, CA is bought by Sega & work begins on Medieval 2

2005



These chaps have clearly paid their \$1.99 for shiny horse armour.



also change, depending on how they conduct themselves on the battlefield."

Mercilessly slaughter the prisoners you capture during a battle (a feature reprised from the original *Medieval*) and your general's 'dread' rating will rocket, making enemies fearful on the battlefield and civilians more obedient within cities. And while showing mercy in war may make your generals a target for 'big girly girl' remarks from opposing armies, at least the people will love them should you order them to babysit a settlement. Unless of course they raid the fridge, invite over their girlfriend and leave sticky stains on the sofa, in which case, they could be faced with a revolution.

HOSTILE INTENT

Also adding to the campaign map's strategic depth are merchants, a group of money-grabbing capitalists whose sole purpose in life is to amass money and resources through any means necessary.

"If you want to delve a little deeper into the economy, you'll be able to move merchants to pockets of resources dotted around the map," howls Roxburgh. "If allied factions have merchants guarding a resource, you can attempt a hostile takeover and force them off. It's like an economic rivalry that's totally separate to being at war with a faction."

Next up are heretics and witches, heathen wanderers who spread religious doubt throughout your provinces (causing social unrest) and convert impressionable priests to their way of thinking.

"Heretics and witches will appear at various times and permeate through your land spreading heresy," Roxburgh continues, during a rare respite from the NCsoft stand. "You can send in priests to convert them, but if they fail, they'll be turned into heretics too." And yes, you can burn them.

KICK UP THE ARSE

Avid *Total War* fans will be happy to know that the assassination animations – brief cut-scenes, which chart the success or failure of a professional hit – are back after their disappearance in *Medieval* and *Rome*. "We have loads of these, so it's unlikely you'll ever see the same one twice," screeches Roxburgh as the cacophony restarts. "There are different movies for all of the different targets you can kill, for successes, failures and even ones for when the target manages to escape," adds Mark Sutherns. Unlike *Shogun*'s basic and repetitive animations, these murderous moments prove of the highest quality, perfectly raising that tension before reaching their unpredictable conclusions.

Another criticism of *Rome* was the relative comfort you'd enjoy once you'd built up a sizeable empire. With your capital city surrounded by vassal states, your kingdom's epi-centre would rarely feel threatened. Not this time, though.

"We're making the campaign map AI far more proactive than before. You'll find that your homeland will be attacked a lot more. Your enemies may stick a large army on a fleet and come and attack you at your main city. That's why all of the city fortifications you've built up for your main cities will become far more important this time around," hollers Roxburgh.

What's more, once your medieval empire becomes overwhelmingly powerful, you'll quickly find your rivals rallying together to oppose your expanding kingdom, a feature which the team hopes will make the game challenging from beginning to end. So, with the strategic map clearly enjoying a sizeable makeover, we move on to the part I've really been waiting for the most, the real-time battles...

TO WAR!

During the course of the next 20 minutes, I sit through three battles, each one more brutal and cinematic than the last.

First off is the age-old grudge match between the

"There's going to be oats, right?"



Tranquil for now...



It's rude to point.





Animation on individual units is breathtaking.



"Yes, but did you bring a flag?" "Hundreds, actually."

Papal politics

If no-one else can, Vatican



The always charming Pope Innocent X.

The pope and the crusades will play a far more prominent role than they did in the original *Medieval*. For starters, you'll have to manage your relationship with the pope much more carefully, ensuring you build plenty of churches and cathedrals, while making sure you stamp out any heretics or witches before they have a chance to infect your populace with their heathen views.

However, if you fancy installing one of your own priests into the Vatican, you'll first need to get them elected to the College of Cardinals, then either win votes through virtuous deeds or by bribing other nations with fat wads of non-sequential bills stuffed into brown envelopes.

Once you build up enough influence with the pope, you'll then be able to persuade him to call crusades that are beneficial to your nation, at which point a bunch of inbred rich boys will march to their deaths to extend your holdings under the pretence of religious duty. To help speed them to their graves will be a double movement bonus as well as a battlefield cross that acts as a morale-boosting emblem. For the king, for god, for increased economical stability... To war!

English and the French, set in lush surroundings flanked on both sides by dense forests. With Roxburgh's English forces dug in along a ridge, the French infantry launch an audacious bid to turn themselves into gallic kebabs as they march straight onto a row of spikes placed down by his archers (an all-new feature), while they send their cavalry through the trees to launch a surprise attack. Misjudged in the extreme, Roxburgh quickly dispatches an attempted foot soldier diversion, leaving the French mounted knights isolated and vulnerable.

What strikes me most though isn't the French tactical naivety, but the breathtaking level of detail that these battles contain. Gone are the clone armies of *Rome*, replaced by rows of unique soldiers, their armour acquiring blood and mud as they duel with their opponents, before visibly scanning their surroundings for their next victim.

Dead bodies now stack up in horrific mounds – rather than the flat 2D corpses of *Rome* – while the battle physics have clearly enjoyed a makeover, with clashes looking more brutal and jarring than ever before. Individual blades of grass sway in the breeze, shrubs look prunable, weather changes dynamically and night-time battles are looking more visually impressive than ever, while every armour and weapon upgrade you make in the strategic map is now visually represented on the real-time battlefield.

WALL FALL

Battle number two is a desert skirmish. English crusaders battle the Egyptians, pounding the massed enemy ranks with mighty cannons. Finally, Roxburgh takes on an Aztec tribe. After obliterating their city walls with siege weapons (walls now crumble brick by brick, rather than in massive sections), the

The American dream

I want to live in the Americas...



Thankfully, the horses are too stupid to realise how daft they look.



Christopher Columbus:
not so innocent.

Towards the latter stages of the game, an historical event will insinuate that there could be land across the sea. That place is, of course, the Americas. Teeming with resources, you and every other nation will suddenly become locked in a race to get over there, cleanse the lands of any indigenous people (aka The Aztecs) and liberate all of the natural resources from these brutal, heathen, heretical barbarians who dare inhabit an area of such economic wealth.


But bolstering your coffers with the blood of innocent American tribes won't be easy. While their technology and weapons may be primitive (seems the nearest these boys ever came to armour was body paint), you'll soon discover that not only are they incredibly brave warriors, but that there's "fahsands of 'em", too. However, if you manage to pull it off and conquer the lands for yourself, you'll find yourself top of the Medieval Rich List in no time.

"We've done hundreds of hours of work on the animation, to ensure that the battles feel far more realistic and fluid"

Mark Sutherns, The Creative Assembly

painted South Americans spill out of the gates in their thousands, only to be slaughtered by superior tactics and swords that aren't made from wood.

"There'll be loads of new features in these battles that you'll have to take into account, like impassable terrain. The AI will look at that and think of how it can use it to its advantage," bellows Sutherns. "We've done hundreds of hours on the animation work, so that the battles feel far more realistic and fluid."

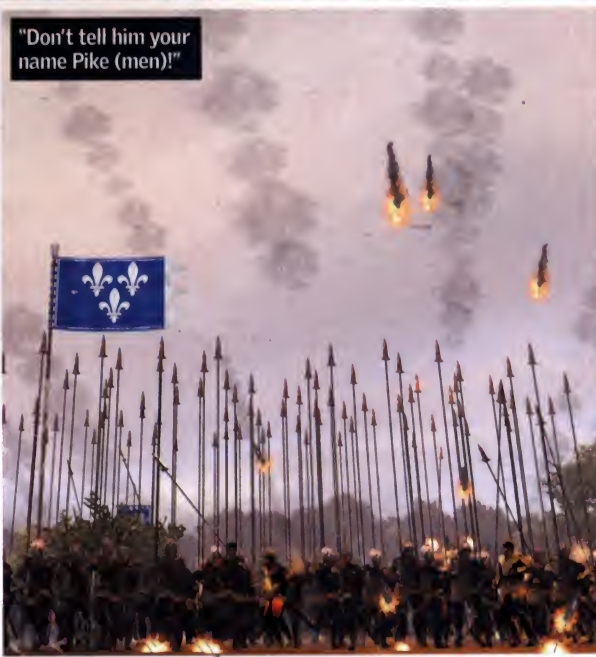
For now, that's all there is, but I've seen and heard more than enough to reinforce my belief that this next *Total War* instalment could well pick up the baton from *Rome* and raise the RTS bar to even greater heights. As Sutherns and Roxburgh bid me a hoarse farewell, I leave their booth energised, ears ringing and bloodied, and ready to kill myself some drummer boys. 



Either a very big horse or a very short knight.



Troops now come equipped with finishing moves and animations.



"Don't tell him your name Pike (men)!"

TALES FROM THE EDGE OF OBLIVION

Join us as we explore the creation of a true RPG giant – *The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion*

IT'S THE MOST talked about game in recent memory – so *PC ZONE* thought it high time to stand alongside the best of Bethesda on the charming hillsides of Cyrodiil and chat about its delights and intricacies. To kickstart the coverage, Suzy Wallace got convivially cosy with *Oblivion*'s executive producer Todd Howard and talked swords, bows and painted trolls...

WARNING!
MAJOR GUILD
PLOT SPOILERS.
ESPECIALLY DARK
BROTHERHOOD...

Q How did you go about fitting *Oblivion* into the overall *Elder Scrolls* story?

A "The story keeps progressing each game, so as we move from *Morrowind* to *Oblivion*, each game stands on its own. With *Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion*, we decided we wanted it to be set in the Imperial Province, which is the centre of our universe of Tamriel. We wanted to tell the story of Uriel Septim, the emperor, and start the game with his demise. He's been getting older and weaker as the games have gone on."

Was there any reason that you decided to kill off old Uriel?

"Dramatic purpose, pure and simple. We'd built up in *Morrowind* that he was on his last legs, so it followed that he should die. We also always planned on him dying in this game to give real energy to the beginning of it, when he utters his last words to you: "Close shut the jaws of *Oblivion*." We thought that was a good hook for the player to follow."

Is it hard avoiding contradictions with stuff from previous adventures?

Great for a mobile phone mast.





He's no oil painting...

"We have to be careful about that, as there's so much of it in previous games. We have people here who research *Elder Scrolls* lore, 'Lore Masters', just to make sure we're not saying anything that isn't true. One of the things we're very careful about is that we always write the lore from the standpoint of the world – the lore comes from someone within the world. So if we ever need to say 'well, that person was wrong', then we can do it."

"We intentionally put repeating messages about stuff we want to remain mysterious too, such as 'where are the dwarves?' and 'what happened to this land in this ancient time?' We write them as history in the world."

"In *Oblivion*, a lot of the story revolves around the amulet of kings, so we put a lot of research into how the amulet has been mentioned in previous games – some of them attribute certain powers to the amulet, for example. We have three or four people who check all this full-time, plus we have ways of searching the text we've put in our games too – but it does take some time..."

Would you say *Oblivion* is a return to more traditional fantasy? It certainly has more traditional fantasy creatures – *Morrowind* was quite fanciful...

"*Elder Scrolls* has a lot of traditional stuff, if you look at *Arena* and *Daggerfall*. So we go for what's appropriate for that part of the world – the capital area Cyrodiil is a little more traditional, whereas *Morrowind* is a province on the outskirts. In that game we had to go to extremes to work in the more trad stuff, we wanted things to be more fantastical, to stick out more. With *Oblivion*, we wanted the forests and towns to feel familiar, so that when *Oblivion* comes in with these otherworldly creatures and danger, it feels fantastical – but it's not fantastical all the time."

What's your favourite quest in the game?

"I probably have a few favourites. I love the Painter quest from an imaginative

standpoint, that you're sucked into this magical painting and you get that five seconds of, 'You gotta be kidding me!' We had a lot of fun with that, re-doing all the textures to make them look as though they were painted."

"The other two – I like the quest in the Dark Brotherhood where you get invited to a dare party – kind of an Agatha Christie, kill-everybody type of thing. There are so many ways to do that quest and it isn't a 'run through a dungeon with armour' kind of quest – it feels like something really different. I also like the Dark Brotherhood quest where you have to go back into the prison and kill the guy who's an arse to you when the game starts – we thought of that early in the game."

"In the main quest, I like the one where you're in the Imperial City where you're going to get some books – real adventure gaming. I also like the last few quests in the main game where you get these huge battles – they're really cool too."

We love the Painter quest ourselves. How did you come up with that idea?

"We had a big brainstorming meeting, where we put up a bunch of ideas on a board. But it was just a summary – 'player sucked into magic painting' – and a short description of the quest. The guy who thought of that quest, Alan Nanes, did a great job on that, and some of the miscellaneous quests, really fleshing them out to become believable experiences. It could be goofy if it's done wrong, but you feel like you're inside a painting. It's actually quite a simple quest – go kill this guy and bring this thing back – but wrapped up with a great setting and characters, the trolls. We loved the effect on the edge of that map, where you see the canvas where the guy hasn't finished painting it yet. Also, I loved the quest reward, the special magical apron you get – my character runs around in that, because it looks so different..."

So was it a lot of extra effort to get that painting effect?

"Yes – absolutely. You look at all the



We still reckon it looks like a *Diablo 2* portal.



What is it with demons and fiery carnage?



NPCs don't quite grasp the 'fast travel' function...



objects and items and we had to do different versions of them – but it was a highlight for us. The people involved showed a lot of initiative and really wanted that quest to pay off."

What's your favourite guild in the game?

"Definitely the Dark Brotherhood. Even from very early on, we'd do pitches and have the designer write it up. Fortunately, I had the privilege of working with all the guilds, but Emil Pagliarulo, a guy we'd hired who'd worked on *Thief 2 & 3*, worked on the Dark Brotherhood. He's a brilliant designer and had a really good idea of what the DB needed to be, what flavour it needed to have."

"We had one designer per guild, and they did a pitch to the whole team – 50 or so people – and did a presentation given as though the player is experiencing the quest. We walk into a quest and see pictures and everything before we start making it, and then everyone makes their comments. Then we tweak on paper and everything goes through that process again. That gave us a very good breadth of each guild, but even in the early stages, the Dark Brotherhood was looking really, really cool."

What's the most evil thing you get to do in the Dark Brotherhood?

"I think it's easily – and there's a plot spoiler here – in the Dark Brotherhood twist, when you have to go back to the hideout and kill everybody. We hope that's really dark – we wanted to have the player say: 'Is that right? How much of an evil assassin am I?'"

"We actually went and beefed up the characters so they're friendly and give tips, have distinct personalities and talk to each other. We put a lot of effort into them and we want you to get attached to them, so when you have to go and murder them, you feel a dilemma there. However, almost everybody just accepts that and says: 'Well, I'll just kill them and see where this goes!' To kill all your friends is pretty evil though..."

COME TO BEAUTIFUL CYRODIIL...

Matt Carofano, lead artist on *Oblivion*, takes young *Will Porter* by the hand as they skip through the lands he created and talk of all things artistic...

UPON EMERGING FROM THE GLOOM OF THE IMPERIAL PRISON...

"We knew that leaving the Imperial prison was an important location – it's the first exterior area you see in the game, so it needed to be impressive. It also had to give you the sense that you'd only just started the game and that this was a huge world to explore. Once the distant landscape went in, it was an easy process of finding a good view of the mountains across the lake. The location was meant to be a direct contrast to the confining dungeon and a starting point to the freeform world. The dungeon across the water was added later to give you some focus and to help draw you into the game. We wanted to make sure that you always had somewhere to go and didn't have to look too hard to find it."



The first thing we did was jump in and have a fight with a mudcrab.



A real city would have a central business district and a red light zone.



"Are you not entertained?"

Venturing into the mountainous north

"Bruma and the mountainous areas allowed us to introduce different climates into the game and also provided a natural boundary for the edge of the world. Bruma lies on the border of Skyrim, home of the Nords, and the city shows influences of Nordic culture from our previous games. The mountains helped create a varied landscape for better exploration, as well as providing a nice backdrop while playing."

Designing the Imperial City

"The Imperial City was designed to be a large planned city. I looked to real-world examples, like Bath over near you in England or even areas of Washington DC for reference. I chose a circle as a symbol of order and the Empire, and based the city around that. It helped make the city easy to navigate and also gave it a crown shape, which felt appropriate. I tried connecting the city with the rest of the environment by aligning the towers with the main roads. I wanted to evoke the feeling that the Imperial City watched over the entire province and could be seen from any area of the game. The remaining details became a balance of Roman and medieval influences combined into a more fantasy environment."

PUTTING THE TASTE OF BLOOD INTO THE ARENA

"An extra amount of work went into creating the arena, since it's the setting for an entire series of quests. Initially, we planned on having unique arenas in every city, each having different combat challenges. Because of time constraints we condensed the arena to one, which ultimately made it much better. The Bloodworks gave us a chance to really enhance the quest and tell part of the story through the setting. What better way to show how dangerous an area is than to coat it in the blood of the fallen heroes?"



It's grim up north.

THE OBLIVION-TAINTED TOWNSHIP OF KVATCH

"Kvatch and its surrounding environment were created to show the destruction that was caused by the Oblivion invasion. The ruined city was expanded to encompass a large area in the wilderness to make the destruction more effective. We set up a path to channel you as you approached the city to better emphasise the transition from a calm forest to a city overrun by Daedra. The weather system helped set the mood; running through the ruined city on a sunny day doesn't have the same effect."



Remember the first time you saw that Kvatch sky? Magical stuff.



Rather pretty for somewhere with a cryptful of ghouls...

CREATING ALMIGHTY FIERY RINGS OF DEATH

"The portals to Oblivion developed over the course of the game, and ultimately became the main icon of the game. It was an easy choice to use the Daedric letter 'O'. It stood for Oblivion and had a convenient portal shape. The portals were also made to be a corrupting force in the world. We wanted the gates to function as clear portals to Oblivion, but also to be an evil presence that affected the area around them. We used a combination of effects, weather and destroyed environment to create a transition between the two realms."



"Ooh! Shut that door!"

A new view of Hell: beyond the Oblivion portals...

"The Planes of Oblivion were unique to the god who created them and were based around one sentence: 'Mehrunes Dagon is the god of destruction and change.' I wanted to create a realm where this was apparent. Volcanic islands fit perfectly. I liked the idea that Mehrunes Dagon's realm was destructive and ever changing, being constantly reborn. It allowed us to create small, varied worlds that could be continually explored. The realm of Oblivion was also meant to be an opposite of the lush forests in Tamriel, and it also enabled us to have some more fantastical elements in *Oblivion*. That helped make Tamriel feel like a real world and Oblivion seem like another dimension."



It's rather inhospitable, but property is cheap.

JUST ONE MOMENT IN TIME...

The **PC ZONE** team pick out the four moments of *Oblivion* that made them supremely happy. At least the ones that don't involve travelling into paintings or hookers...



It's raining dogs!
Hallelujah it's raining dogs!

THE PROTAGONIST: Ted the Redguard Bard (aka Jon 'Log' Blyth).

THE LOCATION: The quiet Khajiit town of Border Watch.

THE SITUATION: "Having been instructed by a bonkers Daedra chap called Shegorath to create a little havoc in a town of overgrown felines, I discovered through analytical skill that the kitty townspeople were more than a little afraid of apocalyptic portents such as rats, lack of food and fear in general. On visiting the Border Watch Inn Cheese Museum, I discovered a variety of cheese that proved remarkably attractive to vermin – especially when placed in a nearby

bubbling stew. I then, forthwith, slew five pitifully mewling sheep round the back. I'm normally nice, but it was my day off."

THAT SPECIAL MOMENT: Having worried the cats with rats and dead sheep, good old Shegorath fulfils the third apocalyptic portent of fear. How does he do so? He only goes and drops a cascade of burning German Shepherds upon the feline community. Raining flaming dogs in a village of cats? No wonder they all were having kittens. (Boom-tish!)

CONCLUSIONS MADE: Bethesda have a team member who thinks that setting dogs on fire in order to persecute giant cats is particularly amusing. Turns out it is.

THE PROTAGONIST: Uzibat the Night Elf Ninja Badass (aka Suzy Wallace).

THE LOCATION: Castle Leyawiin – home of the uppity Countess Alessia Caro.

THE SITUATION: "After providing Sanguine's Daedric Shrine with a bottle of Cyrillic brandy, I was requested to head over to a dinner party in a distant castle that my quest-giver thought would be a pretty stuffy affair. Armed with a new spell called Stark Reality, I was asked to wander over, bluff my way past the guards and join the celebrations."

THAT SPECIAL MOMENT: The Stark Reality spell turns out to strip everyone naked – or at least down to their pants. The countess and her four guests start running around in the nip, and the guards start piling in. Only problem is that the spell does the exact same thing to you – and you're standing there shivering without any weapons or modesty. An extended *Benny Hill*-style chase around the castle then follows.

CONCLUSIONS MADE: Countesses are always funny when they're in their pants, and even Night Elf Ninja Badasses have light-hearted moments now and again.



Oh, it's one of those parties.



"Yeah, well...
I also cook."

THE PROTAGONIST: Batsphinx the Night Elf Rogue (aka Will Porter).

THE LOCATION: Aboard the Bloated Float inn/ship on the waterfront in the Imperial City.

THE SITUATION: "Having paid for a room for the night, I settled down in preparation for a good day of murdering – but instead woke up with the distinct impression that I was on the water. The floating pub was at high sea and a group of have-a-go pirates had taken over the vessel – intent on finding the golden galleon said to be hidden in it. Working my way through the ship and its assailants in quick succession, and facing off against a particularly villainous individual on the main deck surrounded by clear blue sea, I confronted the ringleader of the gang in the captain's quarters."

THAT SPECIAL MOMENT: When the bandit leader asks you just who the hell you are, you can either pretend you want to join her gang or simply claim, "I'm just the ship's cook". Which is, brilliantly, a line taken straight out of Stephen Segal classic *Under Siege* – in which Segal plays a badass naval cook who kills off an invading terrorist force and Erika Eleniak jumps out of a cake and is all naked.

CONCLUSIONS MADE: Someone at Bethesda is a fan of *Die Hard* clones of the early '90s. If anyone has spotted a Van Damme reference, then please get in touch.

THE PROTAGONIST: Somota the Nordic Thief (aka Steve Hogarty).

THE LOCATION: Summitmist Manor in Skingrad.

THE SITUATION: "I'd been invited to a party – a death party where everyone has to die. Even the invitation the Dark Brotherhood gave me was covered in death. Five people were locked in the manor alongside me, all under the impression they were competing for a bucket full of gold, and it was up to me to off them one by one. I'd bribe each with a hefty amount of gold to hear all of their petty problems, bitterness and anger, find a way to get to them on their own, then a quick stab would ensure a dead body and ever-growing panic. I felt power only previously known by Sizewell B."

THAT SPECIAL MOMENT: Three victims down and the final two weren't happy. So unhappy in fact that one blamed the other and started hacking him to bits. When he was done, and overjoyed that he and Steve had survived the night, Steve stabbed him in the face.

CONCLUSIONS MADE: *Oblivion*'s AI isn't quite up to realising that an evil-looking dark elf standing in a full black outfit, covered with black evil jewellery and with a poisoned dagger tucked into his belt is a potential murderer.

The first of Steve's victims. The monster.



EXTRA EPIC FOR ALL! FOR A PRICE...

Future downloads revealed, existing downloads reviewed...

SO WE HAVE this gigantic playing world, with oodles of content and creatures to be slain – but they keep pumping stuff out for \$1.99 a pop anyway? For why? The reason runs as follows...

"As we're making it, there's so many ideas we have that we just don't have time to do," explains the ever jolly Todd Howard, the game's executive producer. "So with *Oblivion*, we thought we'd have a really nice system for doing mods and cool stuff. People have bought them in their droves, so they seem to be very popular – it's a thing that we'll be able to

continue to do for a while. We've just finished a forest one, and we have another five that are in production right now – we hope to get one out every few weeks. Right now, we're figuring out what to do after the current crop of mods have been finished."

Really? So the splurge of paid-for content doesn't mean we won't get an expansion pack? "No, you shouldn't think that at all. These are two entirely different things – expansions are something that we're considering due to the popularity of the game."

And what's next on the download radar? "One I can mention is what we call an 'epic dungeon' – a big adventure to get the Mehrunes Razor, which is a popular artefact in *Elder Scrolls* lore. It's a multi-levelled, underground dungeon adventure, which is really, really good." And with that, a brief assertion that the Thieves Den download was in no way inspired by *The Goonies*, he was gone.

We asked our man Dan Griliopoulos what he thought of the stuff currently around – is it worth the money? Here's what he thinks...



HORSE ARMOUR PACK

If you've ever been to the Chestnut Stables outside the Imperial City, you'll notice that the proprietor, Snak Gra-Bura, runs it less to cater for horses and more to cater for people – it's a charcuterie chevaline. No longer! With this download, she'll supply you with a free set of either fashionable elvish or workmanlike steel horse armour (extra sets cost an extra 500 gold each), to keep your horse alive a bit longer. While the armour is effective, it's not as good value as other downloads and with no quests, this is more of a vanity purchase for those who just have to pimp their ride.



I want to shower him with metal plating.



THE ORRERY

An orrery is a mechanical model of the solar system. In the normal game, the dwarven door to the orrery in the Arcane University is locked as the pieces have been stolen by thieves. Wander the hills of Nibenay until you find these bandits, cudgel them to death and take the assorted cogs back to Bothiel at the university. Then you get access to the orrery proper. Depending on the phase of the moon, this will supply a spell that massively boosts one of your stats at the expense of another. Curious, but only for *Oblivion* obsessives and not really worth the download.



Those dwarves and their orrery doors...



WIZARD'S TOWER

A wizard of great power long ago had a tower built for himself in the Jerral mountains near Bruma. Download this pack and the tower's yours. And it's worth it – it's got all the enchanting, summoning and spellmaking altars you'll ever need, as well as an Alchemy bench that boosts your skill by 15 points, a rare herb garden, a magic ring that boosts all your skills and teleporters to every wizards guild. Once you've kitted it out that is, which will take about 20,000 gold. It's also situated near much of the game's action, making it great for a beginning character (especially mages).



Should be wearing a wizard hat really.



THE THIEVES DEN

Rumours tell that under Castle Anvil there's a secret cave packed with treasure, ghosts and so on. Well, there's no treasure, but once you've cleared out the tough skeleton crew, there is a decrepit pirate ship. The female pirate captain in Anvil will help you recruit team members for your new pirate gang. Each of the five members you recruit is a unique vendor with expert-level training abilities and a host of new magic items and spells to sell you. They'll also bring with them another crew member that you can send out in raiding parties to bring you back plunder galore. Arrrr!



One-Eyed Willy?



SECRETS AND LIARS

Todd Howard and Bruce Nesmith, *Oblivion's* executive producer and senior designer, join *Will Porter* in an adventure through their creation's intricacies...

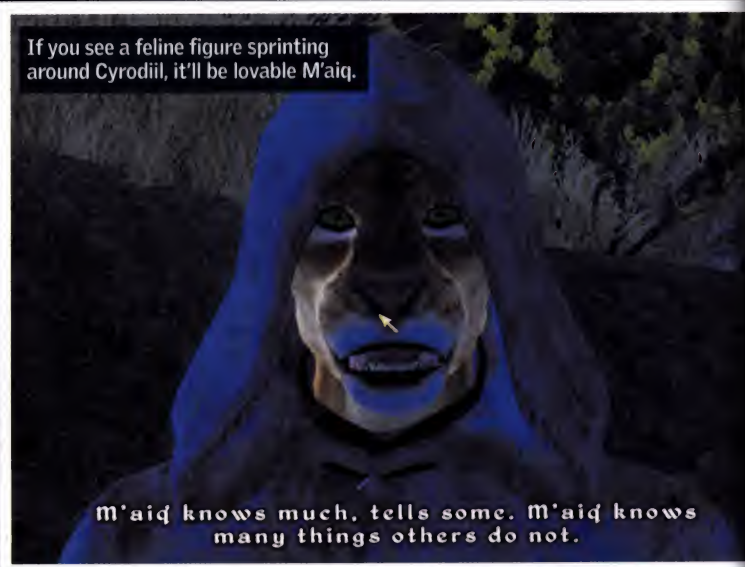
M'AIQ THE LIAR

In *Morrowind*, there was a relatively disturbed Kajit called M'aiq the Liar who, if found, would regale you on a number of untrue topics – where to find dragons, where to find nude characters, the nature of were-sharks and some curious opinions on horses. Now, come *Oblivion*, he's back – although he doesn't lie so much.

This time out, he races around the map searching for callipers in five-hour stints – so the chances of meeting him are slim. "We love to wink at the camera sometimes and have a little fun," explains Todd Howard. "In each *Elder Scrolls* game we have one item that for some reason, all the artists and designers have placed repeatedly

in the world. Callipers became the thing. In *Morrowind* it's pillows. So when you open a chest you might have some callipers or a tong – and you're just wondering what you're supposed to do with these things, and eventually you realise there's no use for them. So we have this character, M'aiq the Liar to make fun of them. M'aiq is actually named after one of the programmers on the team, Mike Lipari, who's one of the nicest, hardest-working guys, who we caught lying about a couple of things, so we started calling him Mike the Liar – this is back in the *Morrowind* days! It's great in *Oblivion* because he's so fast – he'll run up to you, say something, then run off so quick..."

If you see a feline figure sprinting around Cyrodiil, it'll be lovable M'aiq.



M'aiq knows much, tells some. M'aiq knows many things others do not.

REFERENCING OLD GAMES

There are plenty of nods to *Elder Scrolls* past in *Oblivion* – not least a recurring personage like Uriel Septim, books that describe the exploits of your character back in *Morrowind* and a few passing characters who'll fill you in on what's going on back in the land of Silt Striders.

Khajiit and Argonian slaves are free, it appears, but the Nords are running riot in Solstheim (that featured in the *Bloodmoon* add-on) and giving the Imperials a kicking. In terms of clever

in-jokes though, the cell you start in is entirely similar to the one at the start of *Elder Scrolls: Arena* – the line delivered by the guard who sets you free being identical in both cases: "Watch out, there are rats and goblins down there." As, indeed, there are. And while we're on the topic, watch out for the poster that's stuck on the wall outside the Arena itself – if you're a gamer of venerable qualities, then you'll recognise it as the *Elder Scrolls: Arena* boxart.

A fundamental nod to *Morrowind*, meanwhile, lies in *Oblivion's* very first Fighters Guild mission that cheerily mocks the initial Fighters quest in its forbear. "Every role-playing game that we're aware of starts with a wonderful adventure where you go and you kill some rats," explains Bruce Nesmith, senior designer on *Oblivion*. "They're the ubiquitous creature that every character can handle, no matter how weak or puny they might be. We

decided that this just could not stand – we had to do something completely different. So Mark Nelson had the brilliant idea to turn that old and tired story paradigm on its ear and at the same time, give a wink and nod to *Morrowind*, which had used the old storyline in its early adventure."

The rats are still there in *Oblivion*, although this time you're protecting them from mountain lions since they're now cherished pets. How times change.

THE
ARENA

The Arena poster is a nod to boxart of times past.

Tales of Morrowind can be picked up from NPCs.

I signed on for the Raven Rock colony. Went there as a builder. Hung around afterwards, but the money ran out.

Protecting rats? Whoever would have thought it?



Temples and churches played a major part in *Oblivion*'s early blueprint.



Vampires have a lot of fun, but finding the cure is a nightmare.

OUT-TAKES

Areas of holiness are generally just a place for a quick blessing or a rumble in a tomb in *Oblivion*, but in the game's initial template they were destined for a far greater role in plot and quest lines – hitting the cutting-room floor due to the usual reasons of limited time and space. Another more bizarre feature that never made it meanwhile, was another gag that featured Cyrodill's favourite barrel occupant: the callipers.

"One of the guys pitched that you pick up the callipers and take them to a swordsmith who makes you a sword called Excaliper," chortles Todd Howard. "It was hilarious but it crossed the line, because it referenced Excalibur, which is another fantasy thing. We didn't want to poke too much fun at the callipers..."

CURSE OF THE VAMPIRE

It's easy to become a vampire – but getting out of the undead family is a remarkable and time-consuming challenge in *Oblivion* – something that Bethesda intend to put right.

"One of the things I've always thought we should have done is make

that quest a little bit easier," explains Nesmith. "It wasn't actually an over-arching design intention that it should be particularly difficult to complete that quest, I just don't think we realised when we were designing it that it would be that hard for the audience. It

shouldn't have been that difficult. And in one of the pieces of downloadable content, we'll be providing a vampirism cure that's a lot easier to get to. There's already mods that provide vampirism cures out there – I strongly recommend that people get one!"

THE UNICORN

Somewhere deep in a place called Hircane Grove there lies a special, sacred creature. A Unicorn that you're asked to kill in the Hircine Daedric quest. Problem is, it's surrounded by minotaurs, but pick them off away from the unicorn and an unintended easter egg arises – the fact that the unicorn can become your steed.

"It's a moment of inadvertent gameplay," explains Bruce Nesmith. "The unicorn was intended to always

be an opponent – but if you play it just right, then it won't get involved in the combat. At which point, by the nature of the game, you can ride it – because it's a horse in that context. It's actually a piece of emergent gameplay and when we saw it happening in our testing period, we really liked it – so we kept it." Pull out a sword in its presence, however, and you'll be in for an equine attack or two – as *ZONE*'s reviews editor will ruefully attest to.



Behold the bane of Suzy Wallace's existence.

BETHESDA ALSO RECOMMEND...

First off, a *ZONE* tip: check out the lady called Mirabelle Monet in the Fo's'sle boarding house in Anvil – she's a sneak trainer, but also does the dirty with her house-guests. As the lady of ill-repute states herself: "I reserve my beds for seamen..." What's more, elves prove her main turn-on. Oh, and if you say Fo's'sle in an American accent, it could sound really rude. How rude, we couldn't possibly say, since we don't want the game pulled off the shelves in the US.

Otherwise, as a final hurrah from the Beth-boys, comes details of Todd Howard's favourite modus operandi for secretive death dealing. "Poisoned apples in the Dark Brotherhood which you can give to people, who eat them and drop dead!" exclaims the head *Oblivion* honcho with excitement. "You can go into someone's house and replace all the food with poisoned apples, so they wake up in the morning, eat them and die!" Each to their own I suppose...

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PCZONE

REVIEWS

Scaling the heights of PC gaming

Miles better

THE DUST FROM E3 has settled and in stark contrast to last year, the airwaves are unusually devoid of the expected 'PC gaming is dying' nonsense. The reason? Quite simply, PC titles are bounding ahead of the consoles.

While console owners are getting all excited at the mere thought of hi-def graphics, online gaming and downloadable titles, we've been enjoying the benefits of these for years. So let's sit smugly back and take a look at what the world of PC gaming has in store for you this month.

Prey's combination of glorious organic design and innovative ideas will leave you quite literally climbing the walls, while *Episode One* picks up Gordon's crowbar and carries right on with the *Half-Life 2* greatness. *Sensible Soccer 2006* brings back the days of 'jumpers for goalposts' football and *The Movies: Stunts & Effects* adds action to your home-made movies. But not that kind of home movie you understand... Hurrah for the PC!

Suzy Wallace

Suzy Wallace, reviews editor

Must Buys!

PC ZONE Classics are our highest award, with only the best games deemed worthy of honour. These are our personal top tips for sheer gaming excellence...



GAME OF THE MONTH

58

PREY

We're in for an Indian summer with Human Head Studios' organic shooter

The PC ZONE Awards



CLASSIC (90%+)
The best games ever. If you're lucky enough to see one, stop and buy it.



RECOMMENDED (75-89%)
Pretty, pretty, pretty. Any game that turns ZONE's head is worthy of your love.



DUMP (0-19%)
Don't shirk your duty - it's the only responsible thing to do to a game like this.

AND THE REST



ONLINE ONLY

Don't have an Internet connection? Then you're wasting your time. Move along please.



EXPANSION PACK

See this and you're going to have to own the original to play the expansion. We know - life's not fair.



ON THE DVD

Good news! Check out the cover DVD for a playable demo or movie.

The PC Class System

Not all games are created equal, so how do you know if your PC's up to the job? Using real science, we've graded your system from 1-5. Match it with the icon on each review to see if your PC will play the game. We review all games on a variety of systems, including our top-spec, very desirable Xworks X6a-64.

	1	2	3	4	5
CPU	1.2GHz	1.8GHz	2.4GHz	3.0GHz	3.8GHz
RAM	64MB	256MB	512MB	1GB	2GB
Video	32MB	64MB	128MB	256MB	512MB

ALSO REVIEWED

- 64 HALF-LIFE 2: EPISODE ONE
- 68 IRON WARRIORS: T-72 TANK COMMAND
- 68 LIQUIDATOR: WELCOME TO HELL
- 70 TITAN QUEST
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- Buy this little lot

PCZONE SWEARS...

- To only review code signed off by the publishers AND the developers
- To give you our honest opinion. We're gamers. We love games. And we hate bad ones. Just like you
- To tell you if a company refuses to send a game to us before it's on sale. There's always a reason
- To hang up on companies who say that 79% isn't a good score. What do they know?
- To listen to you if you think we've got something wrong. Email us at yourshout@pczone.co.uk

He's a hideous bull creature with guns for hands. But all he wants is to be loved.

PREY

Jon Blyth doesn't need a reservation. Although he could do with some better puns



DEVELOPER 3D Realms/
Human Head
PUBLISHER 2K Games
WEBSITE www.prey.com
ETA July 7
PRICE £34.99



AT A GLANCE...

An FPS featuring a kidnapped Cherokee in a sentient spacecraft filled with portals and gravity-defying devices. Yes, another one.

System requirements

3

HOW IT STACKS

DOOM 3 90%

PREY 86%

QUAKE 4 85%

AS FAR AS lead characters in shooters go, Tommy isn't a happy Cherokee. His grandfather's on his case, nagging him about his spiritual heritage, and coming out with some portentous gibberish about "needing help to survive the night." Tommy wants to leave the reservation casino where he works his dead-end mechanic's job, but he can't convince the girl he loves, Jen, to go with him. He's even got to the stage where he's talking to himself in the mirror, bless.

You've seen movies before – your spider-sense for plotlines is tingling. We've got a moody lead character stricken with wanderlust and suffering from clinical cynicism. So you'll be utterly certain Tommy's going to be taught a few serious lessons about how valuable the comforts of home can be. You're probably also thinking that he'll be proved wrong in his belief that the spiritual side of the Cherokee Indians is a bunch of superstitious rubbish, too.

Finally, you'll almost certainly be thinking that this will all happen either a) in a heart-warming comedy set in a pom-pom factory, or b) inside a mind-bending organic Dyson Sphere where gravity chuckles at words like 'down', portals hide in boxes and

corrosive waste matter sprays into your face from every conceivable angle. Unfortunately for teenage girls but fortunately for the rest of us, it's the latter.

Over 11 years in the making, *Prey's* eventual release feels like the nervous hope and excited anticipation that you might experience at a safari park, when the man in the car in front gets out and punches a lion in the face. It's something you really want to see but things could go so wrong. Will the Doom 3 engine consign the game to a sensation of dark, corridor-ey sameness? Will the gravity and portal tricks amount to nothing more than gimmickry and smoke? Thankfully, the answer to both these questions is no.

But does it deliver that all-important sense of, "Ooh, hello!?" The shorter answer is yes. It's a tricky concept that could have blown up in Human Head's face, but they've managed to create a game that'll get different parts of your body twitching for several distinct reasons. But this heartfelt recommendation comes with a couple of regrettable qualifications that prevent it from reaching Classic status.

Prey grabs you by the mouse wrist, and is incredibly keen not to let go – from the

Puberty had been unkind to Wordy from *Look And Read*.





Human Head Studios have sunk both balls into the honey pot of ideas

moment your casino bar dissolves in a green fizz, and the radio interference subsides as *Don't Fear The Reaper* starts, chosen by an inhuman dime in the jukebox. From the moment you and your loved ones are sucked into space (so that's why they call it a Dyson Sphere... I'll get my coat), you're not left wanting for action or variety. Human Head have clearly sunk both balls into the honey pot of ideas.

There are claustrophobic, pulsating tunnels of slime-shiny flesh, littered with sphincters that can burst with a sodden sputter through the floor tiles. There are open chambers where organs and stolen chunks of planet Earth overlap at unaccustomed angles. As you progress to the more civilised areas, the housekeeping's a little better and the flesh is contained in glass pipes filled with a heaving protein that glistens hypnotically with muscular sweat.

By now, you may have put down your Peperami – but we're not finished yet. There are also expansive mining areas with customary-in-these-situations views of a distant Earth. Oh, and then



"Hey, stop shooting my corporeal manifestation."

Invisible spiritual mucus bridge.

walking sideways, chances are you're looking through a portal.

SPIRIT LEVEL

You start off the game as a cynical sort, but you're forced to maybe not accept, but certainly use, your powers with an unplanned visit to the spirit world of the Cherokee. After an unavoidable death launches you into the afterlife, you're given your birthright. The extent of this inherited gift may come as a pleasant surprise to any Cherokee readers.

First, your childhood pet hawk and now spirit guide Talon can decipher the alien language, distract enemies, and has a habit of sitting somewhere useful. As a decoy, Talon is quite useful, although it's a shame he's controlled completely by the computer, leaving you to react to his instincts rather than the other way round. But then tactical fighting against the creatures who man, guard and lord it over the space hoover isn't *Prey*'s strongest card. They're frequently dropped from suddenly-opened portals into open areas without cover, making it a matter of 'oh GOD shoot it' rather than 'let's try and outwit the monsters'. In short, don't expect ground-

there's the mini-planetoids that you have to negotiate in shuttle and on foot, which have their own gravitational influence.

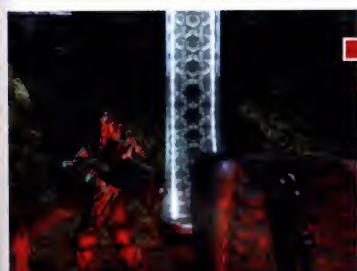
OUVREZ LA PORTAL

Gravity, of course, is one of *Prey*'s big pulls. Wall Walking's just one way of defying the stuff. Wall switches can be used to change its direction, though sometimes it just changes because that's what gravity does here. But it's only there when you need it, and is not really employed as a tactical weapon outside of the multiplayer.

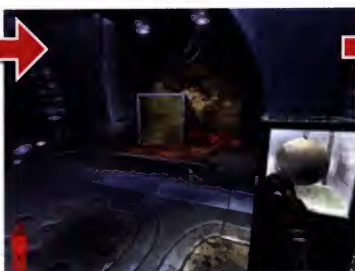
Portals, employed by the ship to aid work by its organic army, also do a fine job of lightly twisting your mind. They can be anywhere – just standing there, a blue-rimmed rip in space, or in that box that just tumbled over and spat out a Feeder. As a rule of thumb – if you can see yourself

It's a mini adventure

Ever been to a museum, and thought: "I wish I was tiny, and lived on that exhibit"? If you lived on a Dyson Sphere, this is all you'd have to do...



"A tiny planet! I wish I was tiny, too. Then I could ride a mouse around the surface and keep the rebellious ants in order. Sadly, this can never be."



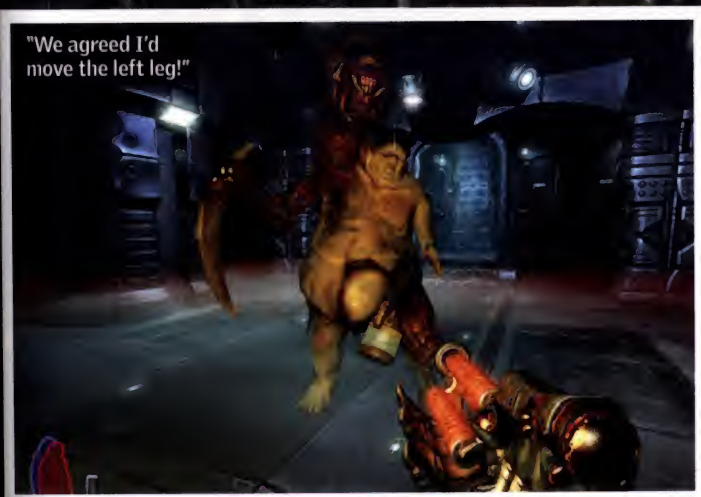
"Oh well, I'll just sit in this box for a while instead. Hang on... It's a doorway to another world! Perhaps I'll marry an alternate-universe Kim Wilde."



"What's going on? I've just gone onto the planet while I was thinking about Kim. At least there's a massive guy checking to make sure I'm OK."



"Typical! Now I have to fend off Hunters. I'd have packed more ammo if I'd known. We won't be coming back here next year, that's for sure."



"We agreed I'd move the left leg!"



Insane men in their pants – let's get wrenching.

The mutations get more bizarre, until you're fighting Harvesters who spring from ladies' foo-foos

And this is Tom, with a leathery exploding egg.



breaking AI of the *Half-Life* or *Far Cry* ilk. There's a time when the Hunters see you on the wallwalk, and turn it off. As you crash to the ground – if that is the ground – and frantically look for the creatures, it's an involving moment but it's a scripted moment, and it only happens once. In terms of fighting, *Prey* nuzzles much closer to the bosom of its *Doom 3* engine mother.

Where *Prey* scores over *Doom 3* and *Quake 4* is by avoiding stretches of long, unnecessary darkness, and by some uncanny side effect of the portals, the feeling of linearity is subdued. The portals really do make it feel like you're being less guided by the nose along a progress bar. Like you'd probably expect from the engine's heritage, you'll spend a bit of time looking for the doors that aren't lit red, but unlike *Quake 4* you won't find a room with eight doors, six of which don't open and never will.

Let's not forget this game is about killing things. The creatures you'll be killing start off with the humble workers, half-human fodder who ignore you until you get in the way. The main fun to be had from these guys is blowing off their head and

both their arms before they die, then running away from them. The mutations get more bizarre, until you're fighting scuttle-legged Harvesters, who spring from – pardon my French – ladies' foo-foos in the walls and floors. See the screenshots littering these pages for the range of dirty monsters you'll be escorting to the door. The door of life.

I'D LOVE TO SHOOT YOU

As for the weapons, if you love watching TV shows called 'When Surgery Explodes', then you'll instantly agree that the weapons are fantastic. A straight repackaging of traditional weapons, maybe, but fantastic nonetheless. The scope is a succulent-looking appendage that slurps over your eyeball with a right-click. The shotgun translates to a yellow phial of what I can only assume is stomach acid. Scuttling, chirpy tripod fellows double up as grenades and mines – you prime them by pulling off a leg, and chuck it wherever the mood takes you. The pleasure to be gained from watching it scuttle nervously over a Keeper's body before shivering and exploding like



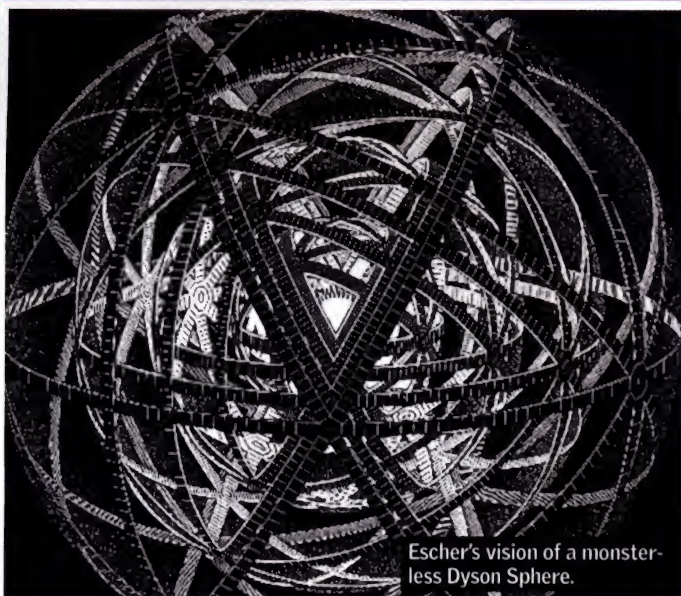


"Meet Kate and Steve, my wooden mates. The afterlife rocks."

The Caesarean was both difficult and controversial.

Dyson with death

The ins and outs of when up goes down



Escher's vision of a monster-less Dyson Sphere.

Fans of Gene Roddenberry won't be strangers to the idea of Dyson Spheres: they've featured in both *The Next Generation* and *Andromeda*. They're hardly new to PC games either – *Freelancer* and *Mission Critical* both featured the whopping megastructures. But what are they? In 130 words, 40 of which I've already wasted (50 now), Dyson Spheres are built around a sun, in order to effectively capture the entirety of the sun's heat output. Imagine a football hovering in the middle of a floating bungalow, with your friends outside, standing on the windows. The ideal size is a radius of one AU (the distance between the Earth and the sun), with a thickness of five metres. Fact fans! This structure would require over 1.4 million cubic tera-metres of whatever it is you build Dyson Spheres from.

a robot in love, well, it's a pleasing pleasure. And the rocket launcher? Well, from what I could see... I can't say for sure, but it looked a bit like a womb sac. I think I was shooting out exploding monster babies.

With all the imagination that went into your arsenal, it's a shame combat itself wasn't more thoughtfully executed. Don't get me wrong, it's by no means terrible – it's just lacking in the inspiration that pervades the rest of the game. Your melee weapon, a wrench, lacks the utility of the *Half-Life* crowbar and will be forgotten after five minutes – ammo is too common to need it, and it's rubbish to boot.

IT LIVES

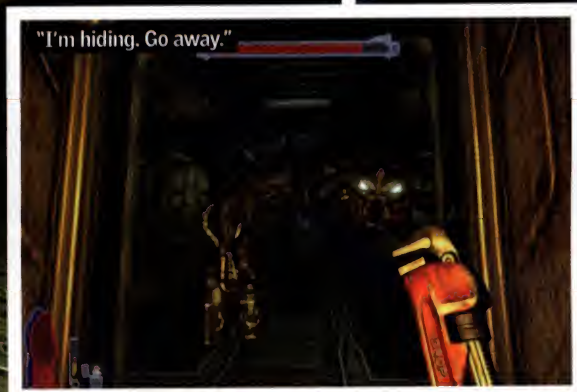
The second of your Cherokee powers is the Spirit Walk. This allows you to leave your body to become an invisible scout and you can also pick off enemies if you have enough spirit power. It's fairly obvious when you have to use the Spirit Walk – when you see force fields, or the eight-pointed symbol that normally appears in areas where there's no obvious way forward. None of the challenges are difficult or confusing – the Spirit Walk is more of an interesting addition in the

multiplayer game, where you can hide your body and go hunting for real Internet flesh.

Speaking of the game's difficulty, the last power you gain from your ancestors, and possibly the most cheering for native Americans, is unstoppable immortality. Death is no end for Tommy; he simply goes to a mystical plane, where he has to shoot a number of colour-coded manta ray-like creatures to top up his health and spirit. A nice theoretical touch, the effect is fairly ambivalent. It renders quicksaves redundant, but also makes fighting skills and avoiding death simply a matter of time efficiency and personal pride, rather than a desperate attempt to complete a level having inadvertently passed a checkpoint with severely low health.

There's so much other stuff going on, I haven't got space to fit it all in. I haven't had a chance to talk about the resistance group who freed you from the monorail ride that started your abduction, but who now seem reluctant to hang around to talk to you. I haven't even got round to telling you about the Englishwoman who disparages you telepathically like an amused Penelope Keith. Or those strangely familiar ghosts who've flown through the

Death is no end for Tommy; he simply goes to a mystical plane where he has to shoot manta ray-like creatures



ship since your arrival, causing a little girl to impale her friend on a 12-foot spike. Or, indeed, the fact you have to fight this girl, whose spirit seems as immortal as your own. She may not have the clenching tension of the young madam from *F.E.A.R.*, but she has got some nice theme music.

ORGANIC BUTCHERS

There's also the radio broadcasts being picked up from Earth, which give a third angle on proceedings via Art Bell's phone-in show. He's being swamped by calls from an increasingly savvy procession of witnesses, psychics and strange-ologists, keeping the plot revelations coming through during the occasional lulls between organic butchery.

Amidst all this cheerful wonderment, the saddest thing about *Prey* is that it feels incomplete. It could be longer, only snaffling around ten hours of your life – but then *Max Payne 2* is just as short and that's brilliant. The main chafe comes from the uncomfortably loose ends, and hints that more was, at one point, intended. When Tommy's cynicism finally succumbs to fury, and he demands his final training, your grandfather refers to seven trials – that never happen. Whereas the main plot reaches a strong and satisfying conclusion, my favourite sub-strand – the collision and overlap of the Earth, Sphere, and Spirit worlds and how it came to happen – isn't even acknowledged.

I'm only grumbling because the bloody game made me care. Beyond the portals, gravity and endemic arseholes, there's a good story being told. I can only hope that the (fantastically) cheesy post-credits set-up for a sequel will offer some explanation. After all, there's coy storytelling, and there's sheer forgetfulness.

The fact that the single-player game is quite short will cause some people to turn an accusing eye towards the multiplayer side of things. And here, *Prey* makes excellent use of the features that make it unique. Maps have you flipping from wall to wall, flying around and Spirit Walking. Be warned, though – the Daz-bright white of the Cherokee spirit makes for an obvious target, and you'd be wise to leave your human body somewhere discreet. Otherwise, you're likely to get sucked back into your non-spirit eyeballs pretty abruptly, just in time to see the acid gun that's trained on your face. The multiplayer is good enough fun to add substantial life to the game, especially if more maps are created – there are only seven available at this stage.

In summary, *Prey* is brilliance tinged with disappointment. Artistically, I love it – if the developers were renting their brains, I'd want a flat with a balcony. On the other hand, combat is far from ground-breaking and doesn't engage you as ferociously as it could. Then again, that could equally be

down to the distancing effect of your immortality. After all, it's less important to play with style when God mode's turned on. On the other hand, and you may need a friend for this hand, the gimmicks feel right, and strike a near-perfect balance of disorientation without ever feeling hopelessly lost. On the final hand, you leave the game with your satisfaction tainted by unappeased curiosity.

That such a good game is capable of any disappointment demonstrates the high hopes held out for it. Despite any reservations I've mentioned, playing through *Prey* was a fine, exciting bunch of hours. It's so pregnant with ideas and beautiful moments that you'd be a sad fool to deprive yourself of the experience. If the sequel is longer, a bit more difficult, and plays slightly more intelligently, then I can't imagine it being anything other than a Classic. **PC**

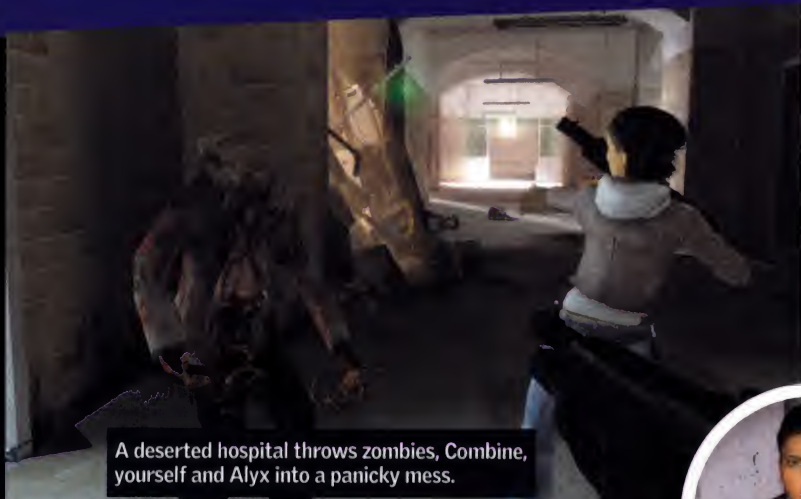
PCZONE

Graphics Filthy-gorgeous, dirty-lovely
Sound Merit but not distinction
Multiplayer Some good maps that take advantage of the game's uniqueness

- ✓ Gravity play and portals work really well
- ✓ Fantastic weapons, scenery and monsters
- ✓ A lot of good stuff constantly going on
- ✗ Not the best combat ever
- ✗ Doesn't finish what it starts

86

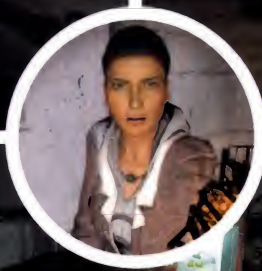
Amen



A deserted hospital throws zombies, Combine, yourself and Alyx into a panicky mess.



Freedom fighting NPCs are back, but don't need ordering about as much. Thankfully.



Antlions complicate matters further.



Antlion burrows require constant blocking.



He looks as though he might be bleeding.

HALF-LIFE 2: EPISODE ONE



A sexy girl traipses after *Will Porter* but he doesn't have the guts to talk to her...

DEVELOPER Valve
PUBLISHER Valve/EA
WEBSITE
ep1.half-life2.com
ETA Out now
PRICE \$19.99 on Steam
£19.99 from a shop

AT A GLANCE...

Five hours of the continuing adventures of Dr Gordon Freeman, with not a little frisson between our mute host and his lady companion.

System requirements

3

HOW IT STACKS

HALF-LIFE 2

HALF-LIFE 2: EPISODE ONE

91%

HALF-LIFE
OPPOSING FORCE

85%

FIRST THINGS FIRST. Don't expect *Episode One* to be something it's not. It isn't a new game, nor is it an expansion in the traditional sense. It won't break the habit of a lifetime by explaining its intricate plot in its first scene, nor will it magic up a new setting for the sake of it, or invent all manner of new power-weapons that the Combine must have forgotten about the first time around. No, for very much better and (as we'll see later on) a little worse, this is a direct continuation of that game we knew and loved all of 18 months ago. As far as Valve are concerned, you're still playing *Half-Life 2*, and if Gordon Freeman hasn't been anywhere since his last outing, then why the hell should you?

Let's start uncontroversially at the beginning – the construction of which surpasses any game in recent memory. I've

never played through a scene with more emotion, humour, excitement and genuine warmth than what follows Dog's opening unearthing of Freeman at the foot of the crumbling Citadel – nor will I, in all probability, until the unlock of *Episode Two*.

From the warm hug given by Alyx to the clever grounding of *Half-Life's* science-fiction sensibilities; from the use of Dog's metallic form as a television reception booster all the way through to a demonstration of the heart-rending bond between father and daughter... The staging of *Episode One* is breathtaking. Its opening, its 'rollercoaster moment', its train ride from hell: all among the best that the *Half-Life* universe has ever had to offer. In our review of *Half-Life 2*, Anthony Holden said something along the lines that it could well be seen as our chosen medium's *Citizen Kane* – but on this evidence, even higher plaudits should

be attached. *Weekend At Bernie's* perhaps. Or even *Body Of Evidence*. It's that good.

BOOM TIME

What follows is an incursion into the silently ticking Citadel – the way you get in there being the most wonderful part of the game, but it shall not be conveyed to you by my lips for fear of spoilage. Gordon and Alyx are on their way to delay a Combine supernova in the sky by visiting the Citadel's shimmery-shiny (and stunningly HDR-dappled) reactor core – and it's here, early in the review, that I'll unveil my prime bone of contention. When *Episode One* is showing you new stuff, and coaxing you to play in new ways, it's mind-blowingly good. Say you're descending into the guts of the alien machine on an elevator, staring up and desperately blasting away chunks of falling metal with your gravity gun before they crush you and your companion. That's



Kleiner's video messages are among the game's highlights.

The opening, the 'rollercoaster moment', the train ride from hell are among the best *Half-Life* has ever had to offer

spellbinding. Say you're opening up a Kerplunk!-style funnel full of happy little rollermines, collecting one for a reprogramming from Alyx and releasing it into a roomful of tip-tapping Stalkers (or indeed doing any sort of puzzle that involves those wonderfully conceived peg-leg bondage slaves) – that's great fun. Say you're running around with the gravity gun sucking up soldiers and blasting them at others. Well, that was kind of the climax of the last game, wasn't it?

Episode One is never less than enjoyable – but even the most ardent of fanboys could not deny that it fluctuates between periods of absolute exhilaration and periods of, "You know? I recognise that this is an expansion, but I do rather feel that I did this to death last time around." It's a feeling that kicks in during a fair amount of the street fighting and survivor-ferrying at the close of the game, too.

With *Episode One*, Valve are fighting the fact that not only was *Half-Life 2* released 18 months ago, but also that many of us will have completed it a fair number of times. With the two primary environments of this episode already copiously explored the last time around, Valve's new prerogative is to find new and interesting gameplay styles to use within them – a challenge they tackle with furious aplomb, but perhaps not quite enough to avoid the occasional sag into over-familiarity. The result is a wonderful five-hour game, but a wonderful five-hour game with a far greater punctuation of peaks and troughs than in previous works.

DEEPER UNDERGROUND

Let's look at the ways that Valve by and large get around this, though – a good example appearing in the hour that follows Alyx and



So who does what where now?

We want answers. Valve make wild gesticulations and whistling noises



There's a fair amount of plot in *Episode One*, but almost all of it involves new questions being begged rather than old ones answered. The G-Man gets all of four words to utter menacingly; Breen merely gets a pre-recorded video message that we've already seen him make; Mossman appears on a video-com once and the Vortigaunts make what looks like a starring role but disappear into the ether soon after. Those unappreciative of this device of prolonged *Lost*-style storytelling won't like it – but, seeing as this is the first of three episodes, I'm happy with the pickings that are on offer. If, however, we still don't know what's going on come the last instalment, then I'm going to set Valve's office on fire. If anyone is willing to pay for my travel.

Well at least he can't lick your face.

"OK Barney, so look cool... Now!"

Zombies + darkness = joys.

Flares add menace to the gloom.

Stalkers aren't in it much, but still steal the show.

Gordon's exit from the Citadel (itself a train journey of scripted tension unrivalled by any other shooter on the market). Trapped underground in a network of decaying lifts, vents, car parks and shambling zombies, it's all very reminiscent of the original *Half-Life*'s ascent to the surface, but more importantly, it showcases Valve nudging a renewed emphasis on the power of darkness into their blueprint. Room after room is blanketed in darkest pitch; your torch constantly dying out. Flares litter the corridors and can be left to burn merrily and throw gorgeous, yet feeble light on affairs. But when the torch fails, the red flares die away and you're standing in inky blankness, surrounded by the groans of a full cast of zombies – it's truly terrifying.

What's more, limited to meagre pistol and shotgun ammo, explosive canisters become at once unseen dangers and unseen friends: never before has the sight of one zombie being singed in the darkness been so welcome. Through emphasising an apparently simple feature like the play of

light and dark, Valve make an old game feel wonderfully new – ably assisted by another new feature, the extra-feisty Ms Vance, casually quipping, "You know, we've really gotta talk to Dr Kleiner about getting a new battery for that flashlight," as the zombies approach through the murk.

DANCEFLOOR FILLER

Alyx is now by your side for nearly the entirety of the episode; equipped with a light-triggered pistol, a series of high-kicks, a neat sideline in wisecracks and more facial animation than you could hope to see on the majority of the dolled-up dames pouting on the dancefloor of Saturday night discothèques up and down the land. Valve hoped for a new co-op dynamic to come through Alyx's more sprightly disposition, and it's paid off tenfold.

In terms of story, Alyx's presence pounds emotion into every scene and in terms of action, adds a new level of teamplay. In an odd way, you don't feel as lonely as before – good as previous vent-

crawling might have been, it's a better experience when someone calls after you that she knows a few stories about your previous adventures in air ducts. What's more, when she says "Good shot!" it sounds like she really means it – with *Episode One*, Valve have just nailed context-sensitive chitchat; having Alyx complain if you shine the torch in her eyes, for example, or making zombie noises at worrisome points to try to scare you. I've just never seen anything like it before.

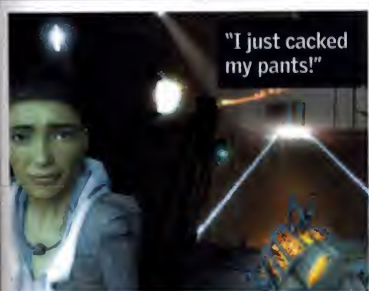
She is, however, pretty much impervious to injury. This is perhaps a wise move in terms of keeping that familiar fast pace of *Half-Life* flowing, and in terms of avoiding that awful FPS cliché in which you're forced to babysit an NPC whose death means automatic game over. Sometimes, though, it feels a bit strange. I mean, it does tear the urgency away from a situation somewhat when your answer to protecting your lovely companion from the advances of a crowd of zombies is to throw a grenade at her feet. Should she have had



Rollermines can be reprogrammed to play Combine chasey chaps.



Now she's more violent it just makes our passion burn stronger...



"I just cacked my pants!"



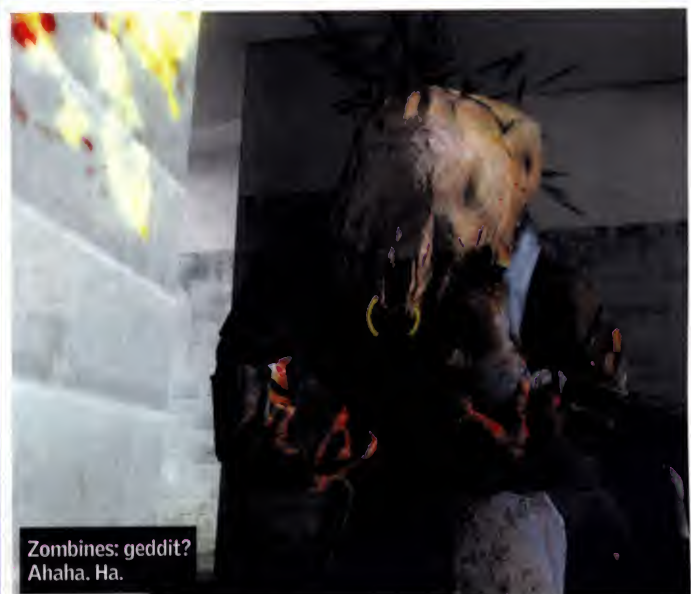
Too much time at a computer terminal turns you into this.



Dog's animation is as fluid and canine as ever...

What is it again?

It's not a zombie and it's not Combine. It's both! A zombine!



Zombines: geddit? Ahaha. Ha.

The zombine is the only new member of the *Half-Life* cast that you get to fight against; others do appear but are swiftly whisked backstage – presumably to be released into the wild in future episodes. Large and lumbering, the zombine's main threat is their unnerving habit of pulling a grenade from their belt and wandering around with it held aloft. They're not smart, and as such blow themselves up on most occasions, but add a definite new whiff of danger to the zombie strike force. Standard Combine troops have now also learnt how to jump down from ledges, but this is probably due to new coding rather than any process of zombification.

Room after room is blanketed in inky pitch; your torch constantly dying out

a health bar? Well, I suppose you're still concerned for her safety (wait until *that* moment on the Citadel-City 17 Express Rail Link if you think otherwise), and there would have been squabbles over health stations – but issues with her near-godhood remain.

LETHAL LADY

Alyx is also another good tool for Valve in the fight against familiarity. One top-side situation, for example, has her hole up in an apartment window with a Combine blue-laser-sighted sniper rifle. You must then run into the streets ahead with little ammo and put your life into her hands: leading enemies into her wavering sights and knocking boards away from windows with the gravity gun to expose the military men rushing towards you. It's ingenious stuff that neatly sidesteps those occasional nagging doubts of 'been there, done that', genuinely creating a bond between you and your ladyfriend as well as a thrilling action set-piece.

As we near the close of this review, it would normally be fashionable to pick up

on how gorgeous *Episode One* looks, revelling in the gently falling snowflakes of debris around the imposing Citadel and marvelling in the HDR lighting effects as a battle with a Combine flying machine rips holes in the wooden framework of the building you're hiding in – and lets sunlight cascade in – but I'm going to be different and talk about the sound. The sounds of *Episode One* are magisterial – and best showcased at a point at the game's close when you face off against a Strider that's not only more manoeuvrable than before, but also has a far better pair of loudspeakers. The synthesised trumpets and parps that thing gives off are amazing: terrifying, desk-vibrating and amazing. Valve sound people: gold star awarded.

The things I love about *Episode One* are innumerable. I love the way you're played with by not being given the crowbar until halfway through the game; I love the script's pitch-perfect gags; I love the way the whole thing opens with an hour free of bullets; I love Alyx blasting an Antlion that's

about to eviscerate me. What I'm most pleased with, however, is the fact that this seems to be the last we'll see of City 17 and the Citadel themselves – because I really feel that my over-familiarity with them and their denizens costs me a significant proportion of fun. Good as Valve prove themselves in providing neat new takes on the action we all know and love, I honestly don't feel that they've quite covered up the fact that working your way out of a wrecked Eastern European city is inherently similar to working your way in.

Without a shadow of a doubt, *Half-Life 2: Episode One* contains the best Freeman moments ever conceived, but by necessity it carries too much over from before to be as consistently entertaining as its forbear. Nevertheless, to my knowledge there has never been a game with quite as much snappily delivered warmth, wit and... Well, soul. *Episode One* is a truly significant footnote taken on the road to gaming nirvana. And who knows, by *Episode Three* that journey might even be complete. **PC**

PCZONE

Graphics Impeccable – HDR and animation astound
Sound Honks, scuttles and moans better than ever before
Multiplayer *HL1 MP* in package. Not sure why

- ✓ Periods of sheer exhilaration
- ✓ More than ever a sci-fi epic
- ✓ Mesmeric script and great dialogue
- ✓ Feisty Alyx works a treat
- ✗ Pricey and sometimes over-familiar

91

Lovely Alyx, lovely game



IRON WARRIORS: T72 TANK COMMAND

Welcome to
tankville...

DEVELOPER Crazy House
PUBLISHER Black Bean Games
WEBSITE www.iw.blackbeangames.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £29.99

System requirements 2



SIT DOWN. THIS game is serious. It's a full-blown tank sim that's so earnest, even abbreviating the word simulation seems inappropriately playful. You two! Stop enjoying yourself, or I'll stop the tank and you can ruddy walk to the Serb Base.

You're in control of the four soldiers in your tank. If you're driving, you can issue commands to the rest of the team to search for enemies and fire, but friendly AI is lacking. It's much easier to switch to controlling the gunner and load a shell yourself, but when you do that the driver slams the brakes on. It can feel like playing with your hands full of marbles, especially when you're commanding other units as well. That's where it gets hard enough for you to want to alter the realism settings to be a little

more forgiving. Without decent AI, real just means hard.

Your tank isn't too robust. After stealthily (for a tank) chugging up a hill towards the enemy, I reached the top and came face to face with the hated foe. There it was, a distant century-old half-breed of Droopy Dawg and a Dalek, glaring at me with a turret that was – seconds later – to completely blow me to shit. And you can forget checkpoints; it's back to the start. Minutes of slow, eventless progress lost.

It's absolutely not a pretty game, and although *Iron Warriors* does offer substantial interest for the super-realistic tank sim enthusiast, the AI doesn't match up to the ambition. Plus, a little too much enjoyment has been sacrificed to reality.

Jon Blyth



LIQUIDATOR: WELCOME TO HELL

Where all the
bad games go

DEVELOPER Parallax Arts Studio
PUBLISHER Reef Entertainment
WEBSITE www.liquidator2.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £29.99

System requirements 3



THIS GAME IS unfortunate in that it comes from the same people who produced the turgid *Utopia City* (p84) – yet despite being slightly better than its sibling, this game is still absolutely awful in every sense.

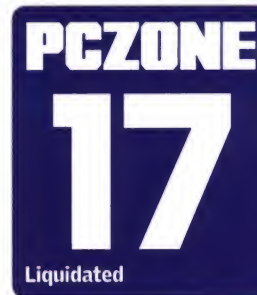
For starters, why is it called *Liquidator*? A man, who I have to assume has never spoken English before, provides the baffling voiceover for the game's introduction that makes absolutely no reference to the title whatsoever. After this rather odd opening, you're faced with the choice of three levels: the swamp, the land of hell or the lost lands.

However, don't be fooled by this initial massive choice. The visuals are dated, with the engine being inferior to games released three years ago like *Postal 2*. The best level, and I use

'best' in the loosest possible sense, is a bizarre medieval-style town in which repetitive keyboard music instils a desire to remove your own ears with a knife. The tasks are mundane: frustratingly having to run backwards and forwards collecting artefacts to open electric doors in a town that's supposed to exist in the dark ages is not my idea of fun.

The only real saving grace is the fact that the game ridiculously offers you all of the weapons with near unlimited ammo from the word go. It begs the question as to why you would ever use the pistol when you start the level with a massive rocket launcher, but it at least provides some form of entertainment. But not half as much as the ironic second part of the title.

Ryan Garsic



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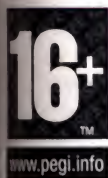
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TITAN QUEST

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DEVELOPER Iron Lore
PUBLISHER THQ
WEBSITE
www.titanquestgame.com
ETA June 30
PRICE £34.99



AT A GLANCE...

Myth-laden, RSI-inducing action RPG from a man whose gaming womb birthed the *Age Of Empires* series. Packed with both titans and questing.

System requirements

3

HOW IT STACKS

KNIGHTS OF THE OLD REPUBLIC 94%

FABLE: THE LOST CHAPTERS 84%

TITAN QUEST 81%

THE ACTION RPG has fallen on hard times of late, but if your memories are yet to be dulled by encroaching old age or rampant narcotics abuse, you may remember a time when it was cock of the PC gaming walk. It was all about *Diablo*, of course – the fantasy click 'em up was nothing short of a phenomenon. As moreish as Sour Cream & Onion Pringles (well, I like them) and as simple as the thought processes of the average *Big Brother* housemate, it entranced millions of gamers (many of whom played it online for years after its release) and made a shitload of cash for Blizzard.

Diablo got its sequel, of course, and there have been the two *Diablo*-apeing *Dungeon Siege* titles released in the years since, but the genre's stock has never reached the levels of those heady days where the big thing in PC gaming was to guide a man around a dungeon and make him kill thousands of monsters in rapid succession.

Titan Quest is supposed to be the game to change all this. Developers Iron Lore – whose head Brian Sullivan was also the brains behind *Age Of Empires* – have tried to create a top-down clickfest of epic proportions, unburdened by the likes of party management, confusing class and skill systems, complex storytelling and, well, anything else that interferes too much with the real business of destroying evil beastsies.

Want an example? Take the first thing you do in the game: create a character. While most RPGs ask you to choose a race, class, skill-set, some stats and perhaps even model yourself a face, all *Titan Quest* asks is that you choose a man or a woman and a colour for his or her tunic. That's it. No need to pick out hair dye and choose whether or not they keep their nails in good condition – you decide if you want your character to have breasts or not and five seconds later you're in, looking down at your character standing in some ancient Greek countryside.

Oh yeah: if you haven't already worked it out, *Titan Quest* isn't set in your standard orcs, elves and quasi-medieval castle-filled

fantasy world. Here, you'll be doing all your questing, slaying and looting around the ancient world: Greece, Crete, Egypt and beyond. Instead of introducing ogres to the pointy end of your blade, you'll be kicking the living poo out of mythical creatures like satyrs, minotaurs and harpies, and you'll be visiting Athens, Memphis and Babylon.

GREECE IS THE WORD

The story, such as it is, is that olden days Greece is being invaded by a veritable horde of the aforementioned mythical creatures and it's your job to find out why and put a stop to it. The form that this investigation takes is pretty simple: you kill everything in your path and occasionally a friendly person will stop by and tell you where to go next. You can also embark on short, optional side-quests, but you never have to wander far from the main quest route to do so.

The gameplay is strikingly reminiscent of *Diablo*: it's an RPG stripped down to almost pure combat, with a bit of levelling-up spice thrown in. You get the odd stroll through a friendly town or city to catch your

The Sphinx: his nose looked better back then.

The Great Sphinx



"That's for being shit in *Harry Potter*!"

breath and admire the fantastic visuals, but the developers have ensured that you're never more than 30 seconds away from another fight. What bits of background information there are (see 'Mything The Point', p72) can be ignored should you wish, as they're irrelevant to the plotline.

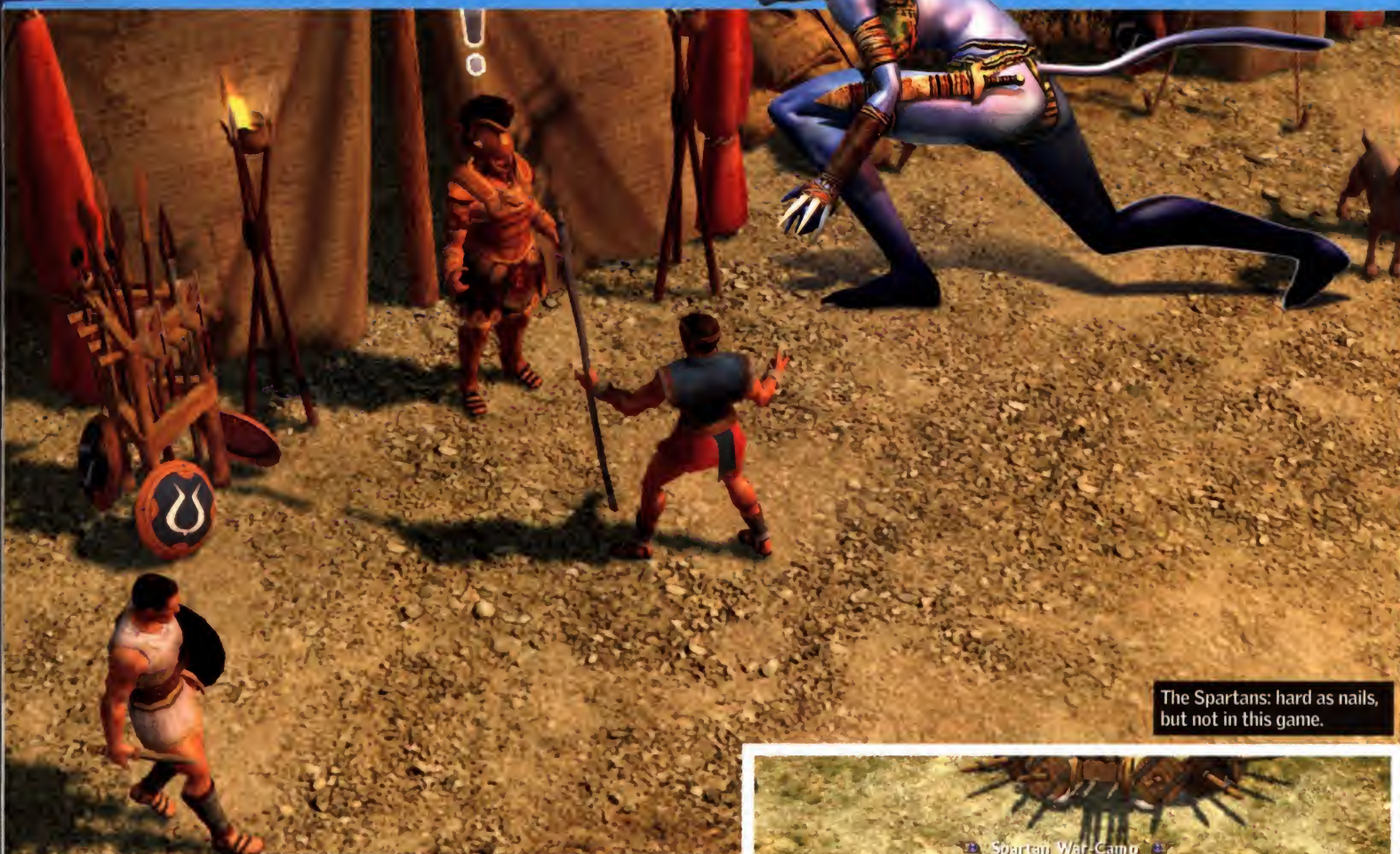
FASTEST FINGER FIRST

In fact, the game is so stripped down that you can easily play through it without once touching the keyboard (except to type in a suitably heroic moniker for your character at the beginning – something like Ajax or, er, Domestos). Left-clicking on a patch of ground moves you there, or performs your normal attack if the pointer is hovering over an enemy, while the right mouse button can be bound to perform a special move or spell. The mouse wheel controls the camera zoom (it can't be rotated, incidentally).

That's pretty much it, control-wise. You can make things a little more complicated (or simple, depending on how your brain works) by assigning powers & special moves to the number



The gameplay is strikingly reminiscent of *Diablo*: it's an RPG stripped down to almost pure combat, with a bit of levelling-up spice thrown in for good measure



The Spartans: hard as nails, but not in this game.



Occasionally, allied troops will pitch in.

Mything the point

It's nice to have a breather in the midst of all that bloodshed



It's not all frantic mouse-clicking and beast-slaughtering in *Titan Quest* – there's a bit of background there too (we're talking a 95/5 split, but still...). Each settlement in the game is resident to a storyteller, a toga-wearing old sod who stands around jabbering on about ancient Greek and Egyptian myths and legends: Icarus and Daedalus, the origins of the gods, you know the drill. This being an all-out action RPG, nothing mentioned has any real relevance to the storyline or the world you're playing in, of course – it's just a nice bit of padding in between the real business of killing a shitload of monsters.

keys, but otherwise it's merely a case of left-or right-clicking and enjoying the beautiful ragdoll carnage that ensues.

So you move your character around the gorgeously realised world and fight gorgeously modelled and animated creatures, usually in waves of four or five basic grunts with the odd specialist class or mini-boss chucked in here and there. Say you're currently encountering a load of half-man, half-goat satyrs, for instance: some will be bowmen, some will wield axes or spears, one or two will be spell-chucking shamans and once in a while, a hulking, muscular brute will crop up. As variety goes, it's hardly amazing, but what is niftier than a nifty thing is the fact that the enemies and the weapons or loot they carry are somewhat randomly generated. We say 'somewhat'

because certain kinds of creature (satyrs, undead, insects, demons etc) will always inhabit certain areas, but the actual specific creatures will be different each time you play through.

WHO'S THE BOSS?

An action RPG wouldn't be complete without its boss fights, and *Titan Quest* does well here – at least on the visual front. The first huge foe you fight is a Cyclops (see 'Die Cyclops, die!', above right), and he's BIG. In fact, to show you how hard he is, he bashes in the skulls of a few pathetic hoplites before turning his one-eyed gaze on you. Later, you face a giant minotaur (in the middle of a Cretan labyrinth, natch), skeletal princes, scuttling spider-queens and – shades of Ray Harryhausen here – animated statues. All of

Die Cyclops, die! How to kill a one-eyed giant in four easy steps...



Oh no! The Cyclops is smashing my Greek pals faces in with a bit of rock tied to half a tree trunk. Perhaps if I stand behind him he won't notice me...



Well, that didn't work. Now it's just me and old one-eye, face to hideously contorted face. Either I make a dash for it or it's time for plan B...



Summon up the Core Dweller, my trusty lava-filled companion. While he keeps the monster busy, I'll blast him with fire...



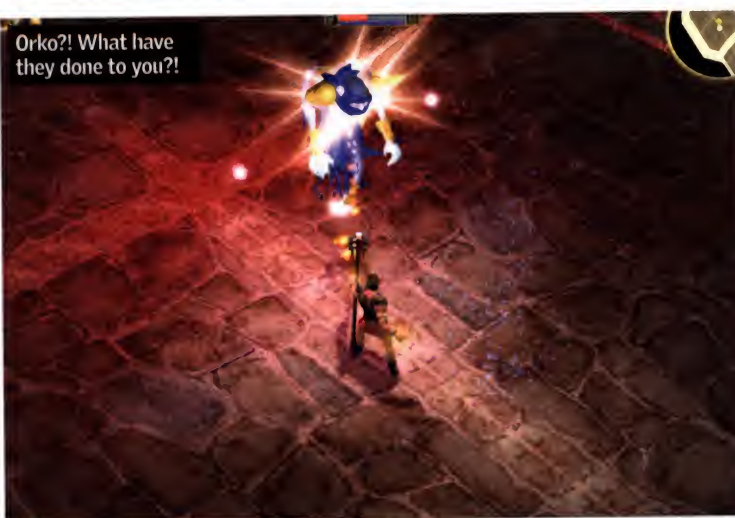
Ha ha! Not so tough now that you're dead, are you? You've only got three fingers on each hand too, you freak! Gutted!



Yes, that satyr's face IS oozing purple gunk.



Dance, goatboy, dance!



Orko?! What have they done to you?!

Telkine is a powerful titan badass, but he looks like (we kid you not) an evil version of Orko from *He-Man*

them look eye-gogglingly impressive, especially when they die in awesome ragdoll fashion.

The only exception is the Telkine, a hugely powerful titan apparently created by the developers. Before meeting him, several people inform you in panicked tones about what a badass he is, but for some reason, Iron Lore have made him look like (we kid you not) an evil version of Orko from *He-Man*. As well as being a bit silly, it looks out of place, smacking more of a traditional sword, sorcery and beard-ridden fantasy setting than one based on real myths and legends.

REPEAT, RELAX, RINSE

The real disappointment with the bosses is that, when it all boils down to it, you fight them in the exact same way as you fight anything else in the game – by giving your mouse a good old bashing. They just take a bit longer to fall down, that's all.

If this game does have a serious flaw, it's the fact that, as the boss fights illustrate, it's extremely repetitive. Every bad guy, no matter what kind, can be killed in the same way as the last and, with nothing meaty in the way of plot or character interaction to break it up (your guy/gal doesn't ever speak), it becomes almost hypnotically relentless.

What helps to keep you going, as was the case with *Diablo*, is the fact that you develop your character's skills and collect shinier and sharper weaponry as you progress through the game. Each monster you kill, and each side-quest you complete, rewards you with experience points and loot, be it weapons, armour, rings or simply cash to spend later on weapons, armour and rings.

BAGS OF CHARACTER

Stuff your experience sack with enough XP and you'll level-up, allowing you to bump up your stats and increase your powers and spells. There isn't a strict class system here: you choose one



I'm in denial.



You just knew living statues would feature somewhere.

You can specialise in stealth and ranged attacks, be a masochistic bastard or a graceful fighter, slicing and dicing your way through legions of blade-fodder

Charm school

Customise your kit the *Titan Quest* way...



Every so often, one of the monsters you eviscerate/burn/bludgeon/freeze to death will drop a charm, which is basically a power-up that can be used to permanently buff a piece of armour, weaponry or jewellery. Sweet as. But what's even better is waiting until you've collected a few charms of the same type, then combining them in a neat 'the whole is worth more than the sum of its parts' kinda way; this charges your chosen bit of kit with the cumulative effect plus a bonus. Huzzah! You see - good things do come to those who wait.

One of eight skill trees.





Beetle vomit: fluorescent.



That's one way to light a barbecue.



Almost every baddie drops something when dead.



This is as good as character interaction gets.



If in doubt, run like buggery.

mastery at level one and a second at level eight. Each mastery contains its own powers and abilities, which can be picked and chosen as you see fit.

I created a magic-using character (did the Greeks have wizards?), able to summon a hard-hitting buddy made out of lava and rock, shoot fire out of my hands and turn enemies against each other, but the possibilities are pretty much limitless given the amount of customisation. You can be a rogue-type fellow specialising in stealth and ranged attacks, a masochistic bastard able to lap up massive amounts of punishment or a graceful fighter, slicing and dicing your way through legions of blade-fodder with a sword in each hand.

Add the customisable weapons and armour (see 'Charm School', opposite) and you're laughing. Yep, character development is the one part of *Titan Quest* that feels semi-innovative. That's not to rubbish the game at all – after all, Iron Lore never set out to make *Oblivion*, *Fallout* or *Planescape Torment*. They didn't even set out to 're-imagine' the action RPG genre – they just wanted to make a big game that was as simple and as enjoyable to play as *Diablo*.

In this, they've succeeded. While the story (penned by *Braveheart* and, er, *Pearl Harbor* scribe Randall Wallace) may be more hackneyed than a man repeatedly

driven over by a fleet of black cabs, the game feels huge and some of the set pieces and locations look suitably epic. In fact, besides *Oblivion*, it's the best RPG around in terms of its presentation.

WHAT A BOAR

The music score is stirring, the sound effects solid (a dying boar sounds exactly as we imagine a dying boar would!) and the graphics are utterly beautiful. The ragdoll physics add immeasurably to the fun of the game – I couldn't stifle my cackles as my beefy rock-and-lava sidekick punched a blue-skinned woman off a cliff and into the sea hundreds of feet below – and there's simply an overall feel of a well-made, quality product. It's also incredibly accessible – Iron Lore have said they wanted to make a game that your mum could pick up and play (actually they said, "your mom"), and to their credit, they have. Everything is tool-tipped to death, but you'd have to be a halfwit to have trouble understanding what's required of you here.

But, needless to say, it won't appeal to everyone. The lack of a gripping storyline is a minor flaw for a game like this, but it's a flaw all the same. There's also the danger that, eleven or so hours into things, the sheer repetitiveness (and dare I say it, easiness – I died on about two or three occasions the whole time I played it) of the game might

have worn you down to such a state that you might decide to put the thing back in its box and go back to the non-linear likes of *Oblivion*. These things are linked, of course – a plot laced with twists, turns, intriguing characters and powerful themes (you know: revenge, love, lust, betrayal) can drive a game on when the gameplay itself starts to become a bit of a chore (see *Baldur's Gate II*). You don't get that here.

Then again, nice as it would be, you shouldn't really expect it. This is a pure action RPG with huge production values, great visuals and a fairly diverting levelling system. It doesn't rewrite the rules of the genre because it isn't supposed to. Allow me an analogy, if you will: if *Oblivion* is a gourmet dish with a rewarding taste that needs some acquiring, *Titan Quest* is a Big Mac – it's pretty tasty and fills a hole, but it isn't going to provide any huge surprises. **PCZ**

PCZONE

Graphics Simply beautiful
Sound Atmospheric tunes and grunting
Multiplayer Yes – six-player co-op

- ✓ Streamlined gameplay
- ✓ Nice levelling system
- ✓ Visually stunning
- ✗ Gets repetitive
- ✗ 'Meh' storyline
- ✗ A bit easy

81

The *Diablo's* in the details



THE MOVIES: STUNTS & EFFECTS

Steve Hogarty gets the obligatory cunning stunt joke out of the way

DEVELOPER Lionhead
PUBLISHER Activision
WEBSITE
www.themoviesgame.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £19.99



AT A GLANCE...

The Movies gains a more than worthwhile expansion which provides exactly the sort of entertainment you'd expect it to.

System requirements

3

HOW IT STACKS

THE MOVIES 95%

THE MOVIES:
STUNTS & EFFECTS 84%

BLACK & WHITE 2
BATTLE OF THE GODS 70%

YOU COULDN'T IMAGINE *Mission: Impossible* without Tom Cruise rappelling through a ventilation duct to hack into a high-security computer terminal. Or *Brokeback Mountain* with a high-speed helicopter chase through a city, followed by an explosion and a giant mutant attack. Now remember how, when we reviewed *The Movies* back in issue 162, adored it and smothered it in a warm, fluffy Classic Award, we demanded the inclusion of stunts (and musicals, but mostly stunts). Now be amazed at Paul Presley's Nostradamus-like abilities, because here it is – a stunts expansion for *The Movies*.

This isn't mere tacked-on content, with the inclusion of a new stuntman character class who must be hired and cast along with the rest of the crew. Developing these stunt doubles from mere falling-down artists into professional high-flying, magical flip-around, fire-dodging, explosion-loving animals is as important as developing your actors. Adding a stunt to a movie is a gamble, as successful stunts greatly increase the quality of the

movie, while failed stunts cannot be reshoot (as your stuntmen will probably need immediate hospital treatment).

At first, your diving divas can't take much more than a comedy plank to the head, but increase their skills through training and experience and they'll be jumping from helicopters and smashing through burning buildings with reduced chances of failure. You can even risk having your star actor do his own stunts, Jackie Chan-style. But, just like Chan, there's always the risk of having them breaking their leg in four places while vaulting over a bus. It all works brilliantly well: stuntmen are easy to manage, stunts are incredibly satisfying to direct and watch and your finished movie's greatness is massively amplified by the new-found on-screen action.

With new scenes and sets, such as blue-screens and miniature cities (for your highly original 'Nodzilla' and 'Co-dependence Day' movies), as well as the ability to control the camera's positioning within a scene (which greatly increases freedom of creativity), along with new costumes, effects and a bunch of fancy

camera overlays like night vision and raindrops, *The Movies: Stunts & Effects* is an essential addition and should not be missed by fans of the original. **PC7**

PCZONE

Graphics Explosions and flames look as spectacular as they should
Sound New effects accompanied by decent sounds
Multiplayer Doesn't affect current online movie uploading at all

- ✓ Stunts themselves are spectacularly performed
- ✓ Allows for far more exciting movies
- ✓ Free camera provides fantastic freedom
- ✓ Easy-to-manage stuntmen integrate seamlessly
- ✗ No brutal animation when stunts go wrong

84
Stunning and effective



ALLIANCE: FUTURE COMBAT

The year is 2008.
Can you imagine?

DEVELOPER Gameyus Interactive
PUBLISHER GMX Media
WEBSITE www.alliancefuturecombat.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £29.99

System requirements **2**



THIS IS THE future, people. Get ready for combat how it's gonna be, behind the thick velvet theatre curtains of 2007. *Alliance: Future Combat* is set over 18 months in the future, in a time when today's methods of international warfare (slapsies, bumps, whirling your satchel around your head) have been replaced with an impossible vision of soldiers, trucks, tanks and helicopters. Isaac Asimov, do try to coax your eyes back into their sockets, please.

Prolonged bursts of sarcasm aside (there's a near-futuristic unmanned aircraft, for all the difference that makes to gameplay), *A:FC* is a fairly well done RTS that suffers from a few problems that put you off, like banging your teeth on sausage gristle. The controls are awkward and

confused; a couple of times I tried to get my bazooka boys to board my vehicle, but they decided to blow it up instead. And while you're trying to issue commands to half-deaf soldiers, it's frustrating to have enemy trucks driving through them all, giving the computer a half-dozen instant kills while your guys say: "Get in the what?"

It's graphically adequate, but plays unforgivingly – even down to the tiny text windows that disappear before you've had time to squint at them. If sitting down and wrestling with a reluctant-to-please game appeals – and I'll confess to gaining a small amount of perverse pleasure from fighting the development rather than the gameplay – then there's something here. But it's not pretty, it's not brilliant, and it's not worth 30 quid.

Jon Blyth



PCZONE
58
The future was then



THE SIMS 2: FAMILY FUN STUFF

Try to keep this
one in the family

DEVELOPER Maxis
PUBLISHER EA
WEBSITE thesims2.ea.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £9.99

System requirements **2**



ANOTHER OF EA'S wildly flailing and barbed marketing tendrils strikes again, this time the resulting wound gushing forth 60 new objects and a handful of new costumes, wallpapers and carpets for *The Sims 2*. Now calling them 'Stuff' packs, as if to justify charging ten British pounds for a literal drip-feed of content while at the same threatening to continue releasing such content packs, *Family Fun* contains nothing which allows me to recommend it to any sane person.

In its defence, it's not as reprehensible as the abysmal *Christmas Party Pack*. The content in this pack cannot be downloaded for free elsewhere – also, the expanded *Sim AI* elements from the *University* and *Nightlife* expansions have been

graciously included. Still, what this *Stuff* pack is offering is simply not worth the asking price. The content is, with the exception of AI tweaks, purely aesthetic. Even the boring box-art doesn't attempt to hide the fact that EA have just stuck a few bits of arbitrary crap on a CD and put it on the shelves.

This is a marketing bullet, heading straight for the impressionable brains of your child/wife/mother/effeminate brother (delete as applicable) – and possibly even your very own pocket. Avoid it, dodge it like I've dodged the numerous incest jokes in this review. *Family Fun Stuff* is not worth a tenner, nor will any other *Stuff* pack ever be. The wallpaper doesn't even line up properly either. Rubbish.

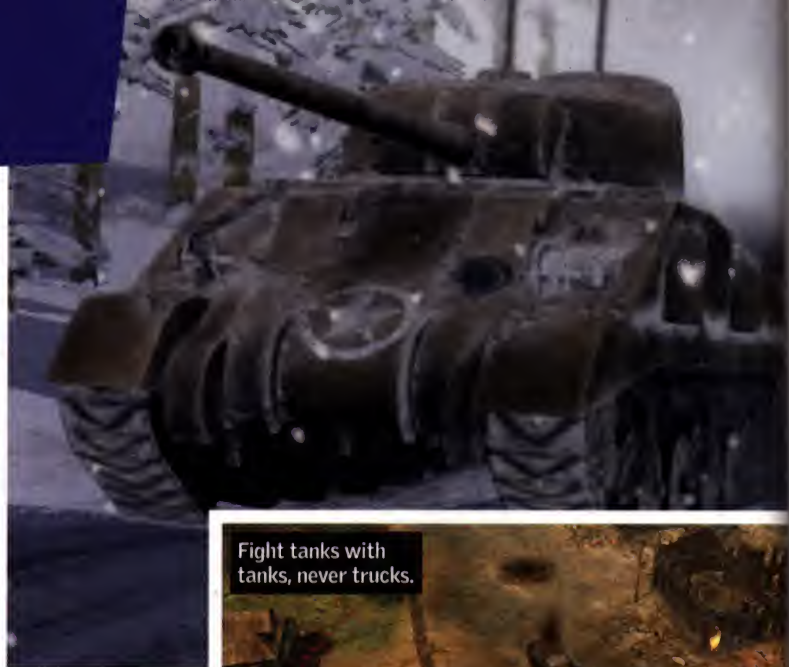
Steve Hogarty



PCZONE
19
Get stuffed



Head-on tank collisions are never nice.



Fight tanks with tanks, never trucks.



Look at those lovely shadows.



The flag gives it a bit of colour. Thank God for Communism.



RUSH FOR BERLIN



Andy Robinson shows Hitler how it's done

DEVELOPER Stormregion
PUBLISHER Deep Silver
WEBSITE
www.rushforberlin.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £34.99



AT A GLANCE...

RTS from developers of *Codename: Panzers* that depicts what might have happened if Hitler hadn't buggered up WWII.

System requirements

2

HOW IT STACKS

SOLDIERS: HEROES OF WWII 90%
STAR WARS: EMPIRE AT WAR 86%
RUSH FOR BERLIN 76%

WHAT WOULD HAVE happened if Hitler had been sacked? Would the Russians have rolled their tanks into Berlin before us? Or would the Nazis have unleashed their secret flying saucers and simian super-soldiers upon the world? Thanks to some alternate reality tinkering in this plucky strategy game, we endeavour – WWII pun book in hand – to find out.

A change from our normal diet of fighting elves or space marines, *Rush For Berlin* – the latest from the studio behind *Codename: Panzers* – is an enjoyable RTS. The plot behind the game explores what might have happened if everyone's favourite 'tached-dictator had done things a bit differently. You unravel this exciting alternate reality across four separate fronts detailing the Allied, French, German



"Everyone leg it towards that tank! It'll be fine."

and (our favourite) Russian campaigns. As always the multiplayer mode is also there offering a well-balanced all-v-all slugfest.

TANKS FOR YOUR TIME

The biggest touted feature of the game is the unique way it handles resources. The resource in *RFB* is time; each objective has a time limit for completion, and you'll be rewarded for how quick you are. Completing missions in a speedy manner will ultimately move you faster towards Berlin, catching those pesky Krauts off-guard. The 'time' mechanic works well and provides a refreshing slant on the old and dusty RTS formula.

A surprisingly well-produced cut-scene pads out each mission, setting the mood and showing off *Panzers'* heavily upgraded engine, which now sports all kinds of graphical tweaks including some particularly nice self-shadowing. Meanwhile, pre-mission briefing videos help keep things simple with lots of branching arrows and flashing waypoints – y' know, in case you're a bit thick.

Sadly, although the AI is generally fantastic, computer battles are fairly formulaic and rarely encourage complex flanking tactics. The camera could also do

with some work; it's usually pointing in exactly the wrong direction and flails like a mentalist when you try to manoeuvre it.

That said, the single-player campaign is varied and hardly ever falls into genre convention, which makes *Rush For Berlin* a decent WWII strategy romp. **PC**

PCZONE

Graphics All looks very pretty
Sound Catchy music and entertaining narration
Multiplayer Well balanced and enjoyable. For a bit

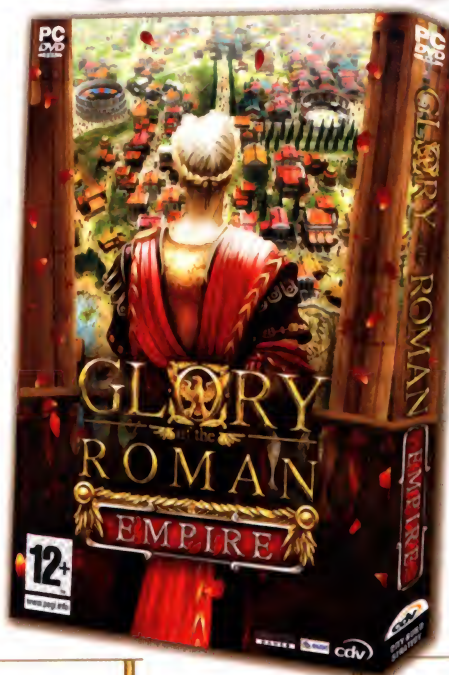
- ✓ Massive, varied single-player campaign
- ✓ Excellent AI
- ✓ Fancy graphics and animation
- ✗ Camera is sometimes confusing
- ✗ Tactics are a bit simple
- ✗ It's another WWII game

76
Not rushed at all

"A CHALLENGE WORTHY OF HOURS OF ENTERTAINMENT"

- GameSpy.com

GLORY of the ROMAN EMPIRE



"Beautiful animation;
lifelike historical details;
unique economic model"



"A game that possesses
great depth and detail"



THE ROMAN IMPERIUM SITS AT THE ZENITH OF ITS POWER! IN THIS WORLD YOU ARE THE CITY DESIGNER AND PROVIDER OF PEACE AND PROSPERITY TO THE POPULATION. DRAW UPON YOUR CREATIVITY, CREATE THE PERFECT ROMAN CITY, AND BECOME THE MOST POWERFUL GOVERNOR ROME HAS EVER SEEN.

12+
www.pegi.info

HAEMIMONT
GAMES

JUNE MMVI (2006)
www.glory-of-rome.com

PC DVD

cdv



Hope that's your army.



Cleo's nightlife was pretty hectic.



They've got the serious hump.



Bet they're here for the football.

RISE & FALL: CIVILIZATIONS AT WAR



Suzy Wallace steps into the petite shoes of Cleopatra and learns to walk like an Egyptian. But the crazy eye-liner's going a bit far...

DEVELOPER Stainless Steel Studios
PUBLISHER Midway
WEBSITE www.riseandfallgame.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £34.99

AT A GLANCE...

History-based RTS in which you play as one of four great civilisations, with great naval battles and the chance to be Julius Caesar – or Achilles.

System requirements

3

HOW IT STACKS

ROME: TOTAL WAR 93%

AGE OF EMPIRES III 84%

RISE & FALL 80%

HISTORY LESSONS. If you're anything like me, you may have spent your time not paying much attention, but should your history teacher have covered the realms of Ancient Mediterranean history, then things may have been a little more interesting. Conquering empires, marrying your younger brother, falling in love with eunuchs and bathing in asses' milk – it was all in a day's work for the likes of Alexander The Great and Cleopatra.

It's these great civilisations of Greece, Egypt, Rome and Persia around which *Rise & Fall* is based, but if you've seen a few movies of the title before with its action-packed vistas of thousands of men battling and dying on the field, you may be a bit surprised to learn that for the most part, it plays pretty much like a standard RTS. Your burgeoning civilisation still requires developing with structures, harvesting of local resources, recruiting advisors for

extra bonuses and preparing your army for times of war.

Saving these slower sections from slipping into dull obscurity is the glorious graphics engine. In the Egyptian campaign, pyramids tower into the desert sky, sphinxes tower over scurrying Egyptian workers and statues and obelisks adorn walkways past ornate temples. Zoom in and things look just as impressive, with burdened workers going about their daily chores, animals pootling around living areas and armed units standing proudly in rows.

Where the engine is really shown off to best effect, though, is in the battle scenes. Flaming arrows arc through the sky, highly detailed units charge across the terrain, and siege units raise ladders alongside walls that are being bombarded with ballista from catapults. Often overlooked in the world of the RTS, the naval battles are a particular highlight. Ships are huge and can be filled with all kinds of different troops, giving you a platform from which to launch your



The University Boat Race got messy in ancient times.



Glastonbury, circa 335BC.

Lording it up

Whose civilisation's better? Fight it out in multiplayer!



As well as the single-player campaigns and chances to play against the computer, multiplayer provides more action for your pound. Choose to play as any one of the four civilisations on offer (Egyptians, Romans, Greeks and Persians) in a variety of modes which include Head To Head and Team Play, in which one player gets to stay at home and manage the resources while the other lives it up in the shoes of the Hero.

Often overlooked in the world of the real-time strategy game, the naval battles are a particular highlight

attacks, while also offering chances to get wet and wild, as you ram and grapple with other sea-faring vessels.

The most impressive of your units is your Hero. Taken from history's list of who's who, you'll get a chance to play as Alexander The Great, Cleopatra, Julius Caesar and Achilles to name but a few. As powerful units they're handy in their own right, but if you double-click on them you'll take direct control of them via a third-person view, where you can utilise ranged and close-combat attacks as well as your superior hit points to swing the tide of battle in your favour. This is likely to be either a love it or hate it kind of feature, but with balance being provided by a limited stamina, I found these moments to provide a hugely enjoyable change of pace as you wade into the fray yourself, cutting swathes through enemy lines. However, if the thought of third-person combat makes your blood run cold, you'd be well advised to note that some levels are played entirely from this viewpoint.

Rise & Fall manages to bring some welcome action to a normally slower-paced genre, but it sometimes feels like this is at the expense of tactics. While it's not likely to

provide a massive challenge to the tactical supremacy of *Rome: Total War*, the game's a huge amount of fun to play and with the addition of the third-person Hero mode, provides enough action and change of pace to keep you hooked. A bit of a turn-up for the history books, then. **PCZ**

PCZONE

Graphics Glorious views and
Sound Epic background music,
decent sound effects
Multiplayer Up to eight players

- ✓ Great graphics engine
- ✓ Action-packed Hero mode
- ✓ Decent multiplayer options
- ✗ Not very tactical
- ✗ Standard RTS sections can feel uninspired

80

Niles ahead



X-MEN: THE OFFICIAL GAME

X-citing or X-crement?

DEVELOPER Z-Axis/Beenox
PUBLISHER Activision
WEBSITE www.activision.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £29.99

System requirements 2

AFTER THE ABOMINABLE *X-Men: Wolverine's Revenge*, I wasn't holding out much hope for this latest movie tie-in third-person action-adventure, based on Marvel's superhuman freakoids. However, unless my brain is being fried by Professor Xavier's Cerebro machine, I quite enjoyed *X-Men: The Official Game*.

Scripted by the latest movie's co-writer Zak Penn, the game neatly bridges the gap between *X-Men 2* and *X-Men 3*, explaining events just after the tragic drowning of Jean Grey at Alkali Lake.

You control three of the most popular X-Men – adamantium-clawed Wolverine, ice-spewing new boy Iceman and teleporting blue demon Nightcrawler, with each presenting differing gameplay experiences. Wolverine's levels are full-on melee combat, where you can employ a fury

meter to unleash manic attacks against AI-controlled enemies, whereas Iceman's missions comprise of flying around on an ice trail and freezing foes with sub-zero blasts. However, the most satisfying combat is with Nightcrawler, who can teleport directly behind baddies, before pummeling their stupid, surprised faces.

You can also summon help from other X-Men such as Storm during certain levels, which is hugely satisfying as she strikes down numerous enemies – including the a-bit-crap enemy Multiple Man – with high-voltage lightning death from above. A neat semi-RPG touch is the ability to enhance your character's abilities and stats after every level, although it's very basic stuff on offer.

Yes, *X-Men: The Official Game* is a blatant console port, but there's enough throwaway gameplay here along with destructible environments, Havok physics, movie soundtrack and half-decent graphic novel-style cut-scenes to warrant a look – if you're a Marvel fanboy after a game with a bit of X factor.

Jamie Sefton



PCZONE

59

Officially OK



You can now take control of the 'keeper.



Top-down is the new sideways.

Pos	Team	PL	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
1	Pc Zone	2	2	0	0	9	0	6
2	Everton	2	1	1	0	5	2	4
3	Birmingham	2	1	1	0	5	2	4
4	M'chester Reds	2	1	1	0	6	4	4
5	Middlesbrough	2	1	1	0	4	3	4
6	London Blues	2	1	1	0	3	2	4
7	Blackburn	2	1	1	0	3	2	4
8	Newcastle	2	1	1	0	3	2	4
9	Fulham	2	1	1	0	2	1	4

↓

NEXT GAME

WEEK 3

M'chester Reds v Pc Zone

We are top of the league!



SENSIBLE SOCCER 2006

Jamie 'Jackhammer' Sefton welcomes back a real footballing legend...

DEVELOPER Codemasters/Kuju
PUBLISHER Codemasters
WEBSITE www.codemasters.co.uk/sensiblesocket
ETA Out now
PRICE £19.99



AT A GLANCE...

The return of an old footballing favourite. Simplistic and less slick than FIFA or Pro Evo, but fantastic fun with great customisation.

System requirements

2

HOW IT STACKS

PRO EVOLUTION SOCCER 5 **93%**

SENSIBLE SOCCER 2006 **79%**

2006 FIFA WORLD CUP **78%**

THE FIRST TRULY great football videogame was *Sensible Soccer* – if you had an Amiga or Atari ST at the beginning of the 1990s, this was a game that you played until your fingers throbbed with arthritic spasms from gripping the joystick too hard. Enough reminiscing – fans of *Sensi* can relax, as the latest iteration is a brilliant return to form, although not quite the dream comeback we all wanted to cheer on from the terraces.

The new *Sensible Soccer* retains the easy to pick up, difficult to master aesthetic, complete with top-down view, but now with attractive cel-shaded graphics for those characteristic big-headed players. Jump straight in and you'll initially find the slimmed-down controls – just three buttons for short pass/tackle and long pass/shoot/slide tackle plus sprint – a little disorientating, but give it an hour, and you'll be confidently knocking the ball about the pitch like Beckham.

Speaking of which, if you wish to bend the ball like the sarong-wearing England

captain, 'aftertouch' allows you to swing the path of the football left or right, as well as lift the ball in the air for immensely satisfying, pinpoint crossing and shooting. Also, the top-down view means you can actually see where you need to pass the ball, and also aim your shot accurately on goal using the excellent yellow direction/power arrow that appears under the player you're currently controlling.

A GAME OF TWO HALVES

Although *Sensi* doesn't have the official team and player names, another major plus point is the customisation for creating your own players, teams, leagues and cup competitions. The matches themselves are hectic, fast-paced affairs that while enormous fun, can often descend into farcical midfield battles where players are slide-tackling and going to ground quicker than an Italian forward. More worryingly, there are sometimes glitches with the ball, when it'll be heading towards the top corner of the goal for example, then inexplicably jump into the path of the goalkeeper's fingers.

However, for a no-nonsense, hugely enjoyable kickabout that's just a riot to play, especially in multiplayer (no online unfortunately), *Sensible Soccer 2006* is better than anyone could have hoped. And it's more fun than FIFA. **PCZ**

PCZONE

Graphics Average, attractive cel-shaded graphic style
 Sound Basic, no commentary, crap music
 Multiplayer Yes, but not online

- ✓ Great fun to play
- ✓ Fantastic customisation
- ✓ Fast and exciting
- ✗ No official players or teams
- ✗ Some dodgy ball physics
- ✗ No online multiplayer

79
 Back in the big league



THE DA VINCI CODE

Much better than the other one

DEVELOPER The Collective
PUBLISHER 2K Games
WEBSITE
www.2kgames.com/davincicode
ETA Out now
PRICE £34.99

System requirements 2

SIMILAR TO THAT feeling you get when you realise you're about to stand in dog shit but can do nothing to prevent it, the feeling you get when you're faced with the official game of the crap movie of the decent book is one of worry – especially when it's released alongside its silver screen companion, suggesting that the fundamental influence in the game's development was cold hard cash.

Rather amazingly however, *The Da Vinci Code* isn't entirely unappealing. Like realising it was actually a plastic joke-poo you stood on, then turning to your friends, laughing and giving them two thumbs up before walking off happier than before. If you haven't read the bestseller, the maddeningly twisty plot will keep you on edge throughout the game – probably its best appeal. Following the plot of the



papery opus closely, the game lifts dialogue, characters and settings right out of Dan Brown's over-hyped pamphlet of lies and places them in a third-person *Broken Sword*-style clue-hunt 'em up.

Not surprising really, since *Broken Sword* creator Charles Cecil was on board for development and it shows in places. Despite feeling like a rushed PC conversion, *The Da Vinci Code* is an enjoyable adventure. Action sections are passable, and the game's logic puzzles managed to attract a crowd of baying amateur cryptographers. While it lacks the charm and cleverness of the *Broken Sword* games, it retains the compelling one-more-chapter allure of the novel. Also, that loser Tom Hanks isn't in it.

Steve Hogarty



THE SECRET OF DA VINCI: THE FORBIDDEN MANUSCRIPT

This one is the bad one. It's so rank you can probably smell it in your house

DEVELOPER Elektrogames, TotM, Kheops and Mzone
PUBLISHER Nobilis
WEBSITE www.elektrogames.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £29.99

System requirements 1

OH, WE SEE what they did here. You can't say you didn't consider doing something similar yourself. When you spot no less than a billion people reading Dan Brown on the Tube every morning, the idea of setting up a Da Vinci-themed ice cream shop or a Mona Lisa-themed blimp rental service must have shot through your mind briefly. It's a copyright-free cash cow waiting to be milked.

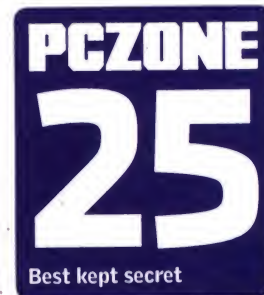
So from this bizarre menagerie of unknown developers and an obscure publisher comes *The Secret Of Da Vinci*, a tedious *Myst* clone with very little in common with the vastly popular book, the pile-of-arise movie adaptation and the official game

(turn your head ever so slightly to the left to see that one).

Clearly an attempt to cash in on the renaissance inventor's newfound celebrity status, *The Secret Of Da Vinci* boasts a horribly uninteresting storyline, mundane point-and-click tasks and blindingly dire voice-acting. Honestly, the voice-acting will blind you. The whole thing is badly written too, and wandering about the manor and its grounds is confusing, infuriating, and possibly terminal illness-inducing. The logic puzzles are sound enough, but when viewed through this haze of intrinsically boring gameplay their appeal is lost entirely.

If the static-screen navigating gameplay of this sort of point-and-click genre appeals to you, *The Secret Of Da Vinci* might just give you some topical sustenance. Otherwise, if pointing-and-clicking is not your preferred method of translocation, this might just destroy your love of all things Leonardo.

Steve Hogarty





HOYLE CASINO 3D

Gambling in the
turd dimension

DEVELOPER Encore
PUBLISHER Greenstreet
WEBSITE www.hoylegaming.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £19.99

System requirements 2

I'VE GAMBLLED A fair amount in my time; I know how it feels to defy Lady Luck, Dr Probability and their doo-wop backing band, the Diminishing Returns. What interests me, and provides me with an academic excuse to throw away good pizza money, is the psychology. The timeless otherworld of the casino floor... Is the sound of a jackpot real, or simply deceptive, piped effects? Why would people play the money wheel, when roulette is the same game with better odds? Does luck override sense?

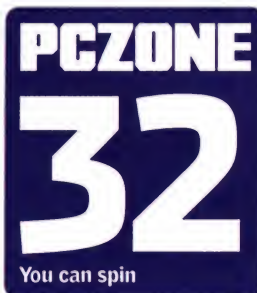
I love this manipulation, this insight into abusing human weakness. I can feel the persuasion and I hate the fact I love it, but I love the fact I'm aware enough to hate the fact I love it. So it's astonishing to see a game miss the mark so widely.

Jon Blyth



For instance, roulette – you can't see the ball spinning. It's utterly ridiculous. You might as well get a text prompt saying: "It was 33. You lost." It's the same with the money wheel – the results of the spin are 90% obscured by the betting palette. Why do that? Why? It's upsetting, the positive steps that seem to have been taken to disengage the player.

If you're here for the poker, get a dedicated poker game. There's some small entertainment to be had, and the paper manual's a decent bonus if you're buying it to find out what to expect before going to a casino. In all honesty, though, you'd be better off just putting your 20 quid on red.



UTOPIA CITY

If this is heaven,
then take me to hell

DEVELOPER Parallax Art Studio
PUBLISHER Reef Entertainment
WEBSITE utopiareal.com/city/
ETA Out now
PRICE £29.99

System requirements 2



EVERY SO OFTEN, a game comes along that makes you stop and question the rational capacities of the creatures that created them. *Utopia City* is one such game.

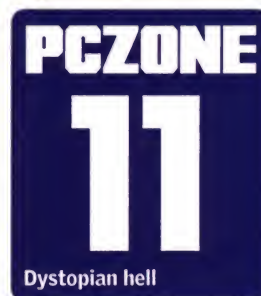
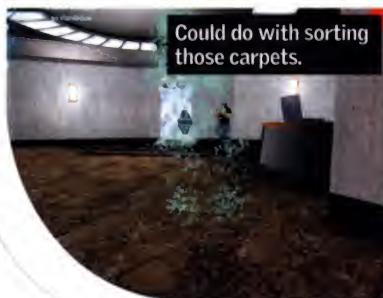
The story sounds fine: an evil leader known as the Mastermind has convinced the world to plug into his virtual prison that simulates a utopia; your job is to go in and kill everyone so they can leave utopia. The big questions arise when you wonder why utopia is made up of only five different locations such as 'casino', 'hotel' and (bizarrely) 'lunch'. And why are there only six characters making up this entire 'utopian' world? More importantly, why does your character resemble Pat Sharp?

It simply doesn't make any sense whatsoever. The in-game text, when comprehensible, looks like a toddler

wrote it, the sounds don't match up to the visible actions and the voiceovers are awful, disjointed and monotone. Why don't the infinitely respawning guards move once they spot you, and why do they remain motionless while you shoot them? What's more, why do the civilians sometimes randomly shoot you, while asking questions like: "Will you buy me some champagne?" It's so bad it hurts.

These questions could be overlooked somewhat if the graphics provided some aesthetic pleasure; instead they would have been classed as clunky, boring and average three years ago. The only saving grace is when you spontaneously burst into binary code, and that only occurs when the computer has been kind enough to kill you and end this gaming nightmare.

Ryan Garside



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MAGICAL ENEMY ALIN • ENLIST AT JOINTHEVINCI.COM

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MAGIC. THE NEXT
EVOLUTION OF
RTS GAMING FROM
BRIAN REYNOLDS
AND BIG HUGE GAMES.

RISE OF NATIONS

RISE OF LEGENDS



Microsoft
game studios



HOLIDAY WORLD TYCOON

Food's great, weather's lovely, game's shit

DEVELOPER Island Games
PUBLISHER GSP
WEBSITE www.gsponline.co.uk
ETA Out now
PRICE £9.99

System requirements 1



LAST MONTH, WE reviewed *Tabloid Tycoon*, a game from GSP's *Tycoon* series that rejected all forms of entertainment in favour of numerical comparison and randomly-generated headlines.

That time has come again. The wildlife are silent as the clanking sounds from the sinister hilltop stable go still and the doors open. And from the noxious mists, another malformed, ungodly horse drags itself out by its single working hoof – a lone clip longing for the clop of its rightful brothers – its organs dragging in the sawdust like 'Just Married' tin cans. The look in its eyes begs for a mercy killing, and a nameplate bolted to its partially-lobotomised skull reads *Holiday World Tycoon*.

Let's be positive. *HWT* makes a brave stab at taking *Tycoon* games

back 15 years. But it just doesn't work. Your architect ignores you in the tutorial. After ten minutes of trying to work out what would trigger him into action, I had four empty worksites and six architects sitting around. And when the architects do work, there's nothing else to do. Click on a rep, maybe. Scroll around. Sigh.

And the cursor... It works on the menus, but is offset from its effects by a good 100 pixels on-screen. Staggeringly, they've even managed to get pointing and clicking wrong.

For a £10 game, a review this bad seems a bit like bullying an infant. But if you knew a child this stupid, garish, broken and ugly, you'd be lying if you said you didn't want to boot it up the arse.

Jon Blyth



TAKE COMMAND: 2ND MANASSAS

Better than *Take The High Road*?

DEVELOPER Mad Minute Games
PUBLISHER Paradox Entertainment
WEBSITE www.madminutegames.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £19.99

System requirements 3



AJAUNTY POP song once pondered on the point of war. The answer, of course, is that it provides a resource for a massive amount of war simulator games – of which some are good, some are bad and some are so slow that you can't decide what they are. As you've probably guessed, *2nd Manassas* falls into the final category.

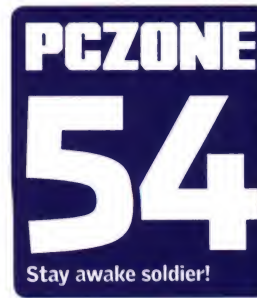
This American Civil War battle recreation game has taken the complexity and difficulties of strategic warfare in the 19th century and done its best to accurately emulate them in an RTS game. Trouble is, it ends up feeling like you're playing through treacle when compared to similar games. The fast pace and fluidity of games like *Rome: Total War* has been drained off, to

offer what the developers hope to be a more authentic battle experience.

2nd Manassas may well be keeping it real, but with only three types of unit, infantry, cavalry and artillery battle dynamics are fairly limited. Plus, with many of the battles taking a minimum of two hours, you really feel like you're there with your troops as you move to kill the enemy. Slowly. The game's looks won't make you swoon either, with 2D soldiers marching (slowly) around 3D landscapes, and the repetitive sound effects ensures that grating your elbow seems a more preferable option.

If you're a reality fan looking for a full-on Civil War experience, this is it. However, if you're looking for a more casual and enjoyable experience as a military general, steer well clear.

Ryan Garside



SECURE YOUR DESTINY



THE ALIN ARMY NEEDS YOU

Brothers! Summon your every power. Together we shall
leave the Vinci war-making machines rusting in the desert sands.
Enlist at alinarmy.com



Magic versus
technology. The
next evolution of
RTS gaming from
Brian Reynolds and
Big Huge Games.

RISE OF NATIONS

RISE OF LEGENDS



Microsoft
game studios

You won't find any of these indie games in the shops, but you can download them or get trial versions on our DVD.

indiezone



Martin Korda takes a trip to some other worlds. Four, to be precise...



Where's a stick when you need one?



Nice doggy.



That's you that is.

**INDIEZONE
GAME
OF THE
MONTH**

ANOTHER WORLD

DEVELOPER Magic Productions WEBSITE www.magic-productions.fr PRICE £7 (€5)

CAN IT REALLY be 15 years since *Another World* first graced us with its presence? A classic of its time, this updated version is an exact replica of the original, albeit with greatly ramped up resolution options.

If you missed it first time around, *Another World* is a side-scrolling action/adventure platform game in which you're transported to – you guessed it – another world. Every screen teems with danger, meaning you must run, swim, jump and shoot your way out of trouble.

Merciless to a fault, this is one brain-bleedingly challenging game

that punishes even the smallest mistake with instant death, a factor that'll either spur you on or have you grunting with dissatisfaction as you reach for the *Call Of Duty 2* CD.

Perhaps *Another World's* strongest feature is its context-sensitive scenery, which allows you to swing from vines and swipe dropped enemy weapons. It might be old, but this is one title that's aged remarkably well. If you're looking for a cheap, fun challenge, it's well worth taking a quick trip down Nostalgia Lane.



Look out for those slugs.

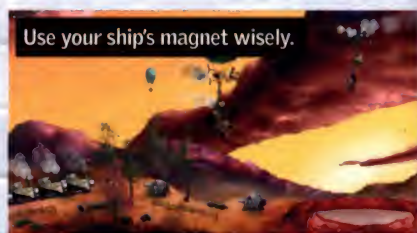
**PCZONE
67**

STEAM BRIGADE

DEV Pedestrian Entertainment WEBSITE www.pedestrianentertainment.com PRICE \$19.95 (€11)

ACTION MEETS STRATEGY in this simplistic yet compelling brainteaser. Piloting a steam-powered ship with an industrial-sized magnet attached to it, you must shepherd an AI-controlled engineer to the other side of each level, and help them infiltrate and destroy the enemy's factory before they level yours.

Between the two bases are bunkers and turrets, which must be captured and held. The more of these you control, the easier the engineer's job will be. By building military units you can attack rival soldiers and engineers, while using your ship's magnet to transport troops to hotspots and engineers to safety to turn the tide of any level.



Use your ship's magnet wisely.

Simple to control, easy to learn, yet strangely challenging, *Steam Brigade* is a great way to pass a few hours, though it's unlikely your interest will stretch much beyond that.

**PCZONE
62**



Basic, yes. Fun, definitely.

TITAN ATTACKS

DEVELOPER Puppy Games WEB www.puppygames.net PRICE \$9.95 (£5)

SPACE INVADERS CLONES are ten-a-penny in the indie gaming world, so it's always nice to see one that tries something a little different.

At its core, *Titan Attacks* is just the same as every other *Space Invaders* game you've ever played. However, *Titan Attacks* beefs up the concept with some excellent RPG elements, which allow you to bolster your ship's powers after every level. The more bonus points you amass, the more

money you'll have available to spend on shield, weapon and speed upgrades.

Throw in some tricky opponents that dive and twist like drugged pigeons and a whopping 100 stages, and you're left with a hugely entertaining if still incredibly basic blaster. If you're looking for *Space Invaders* with a twist, it's currently one of the best bets out there.

PCZONE
58

PHOENICAS

DEVELOPER Mytaras WEB www.phoenicas.com PRICE \$19.95 (£11)



FOR EVERY TITAN ATTACKS, there are four or five *Phoenicas*. By that, I mean sub-par *Space Invaders* rehashes that bring virtually nothing new to the table and then have the audacity to charge ridiculously over-inflated prices.

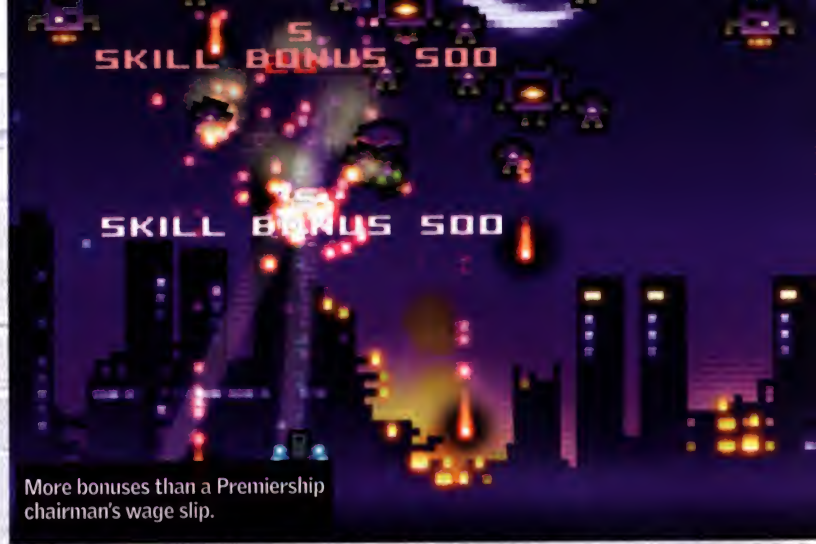
Apart from the option to tilt the angle of your ship, there's pretty much nothing here to get particularly excited about. You know the drill – protect humanity from endless waves of enemies while picking up bonuses. Yawn.

Mindlessly fun in its own right and with plenty of meaty power-ups to collect, *Phoenicas* is let down by an approach that's more by-numbers than a dot-to-dot puzzle book. And with *Titan Attacks* proving both cheaper and more fun, you can probably see why I'm struggling to find much to recommend



here. Music's OK, I suppose. Which would have been great had it been a CD. Case closed.

PCZONE
44



More bonuses than a Premiership chairman's wage slip.



Developer Q&A

VOODOO DIMENTION

Name: Arthur Ostapenko & Alex Backlanov

Job Title: Coder/game designer and 3D artist/musician

Company: Voodoo Dimention

Website: www.voodoodimention.com

Games: *Epicenter*, *Nuclear Burn* and *Master Of Defense*



PCZ Tell us about your company?

VD Voodoo Dimention consists of two members, Arthur Ostapenko and Alex Backlanov. We started working as a team when we were still undergraduates and we live in the Ukraine.

PCZ What's the story behind *Master Of Defense*?

VD A week after we created the prototype, it was already possible to build towers and shoot at one monster. The game was so gripping that we decided to make a real product out of it, and managed to create it in just half a year. After that, we polished it and tweaked the balance for quite some time. We wanted to make it simple, yet as replayable as possible.

PCZ What's your ethos towards making indie games?

VD We're keen on original and unusual games – most retail games seem boring to us. We think independent developers can bring fresh ideas into the games industry, which is something that large developers and publishers burdened with various contracts and deadlines can't afford to do.

PCZ What advice would you give other budding indie developers?

VD Experiment more and make sure you thoroughly polish the game, no matter how tired you are of it. Sometimes you can put in months of effort, only for it to be ruined by small bugs and omissions.

Voodoo Dimention

BUDGET

Fancy saving some pennies? *Suzy Wallace* is your very own money-saving expert...

BROTHERS IN ARMS: ROAD TO HILL 30

PUBLISHER Focus Multimedia WEBSITE www.focusmm.co.uk PRICE £9.99

WWII HAS BECOME essential to PC gaming. Indeed, without the pesky bastard antics of Hitler and his Nazi cohorts, a good portion of the gaming industry would still be standing around scratching their heads and wondering what the hell they should base their games on.

While the big name WWII shooters are generally flashy, adrenalin-pumped non-stop action affairs, *Brothers In Arms* shifted the genre in a new direction with its squad-based tactics and emphasis on gritty realism. Its greater reliance on tactical supremacy put you in charge of squads, as well as drumming the importance of flanking so firmly into your skull that you're likely to start shouting it out in your sleep.

The slower pace certainly isn't for everybody and a lack of decent enemy

Shoot the tree! That bastard tree...



AI and the use of 'invisible' walls to delimit the playing area can grate, but if you want WWII tactics without having to play an RTS, you won't get more for your tenner anywhere else.

PCZONE
80

BUDGET
GAME
OF THE
MONTH

Ever had one of those days where you should have just stayed in bed?



"Sarge, we've found more of them - half-barrel, half-man!"

THIS MONTH PCZONE SAVED MONEY BY...

Suzy getting a refund on a Sunday roast that was unfit for human consumption:

Saving: £8



Log accidentally shop-lifting some rechargeable batteries:

Saving: £10



Clare's dad buying a bottle of gin so she didn't have to:

Saving: £11

7 SINS

PUBLISHER GSP White Label WEBSITE www.gsponline.co.uk PRICE £4.99

IF VIRTUALLY JENNA is the gaming equivalent of a hardcore porn star, then *7 Sins* is a bit like that loose girl from school who'd let you look down her top for a fiver but would never dream of actually going any further.

Feeling like a giant episode of *Eurotrash*, *7 Sins* is a mish-mash of said TV show's humour, figuring out the best ways to chat up women and a whole host of mini-games. Bizarrely, despite the huge amount of sexual content in the game, it never actually shows you any complete nudity - and because of this, it falls way short of hitting the same kind of adult entertainment marks as a title like *Virtually Jenna*.

It's also not big or clever, but it never takes itself too seriously either, and the conversations and mini-games are bound



"Fancy cutting some rug darlin'?"

to raise a few chuckles - it's miles funnier than *Leisure Suit Larry: Magna Cum Laude*. If you're after a few laughs with your mates after sinking a few beers in the pub, you could do far worse.

PCZONE
58

"Mind the suit right, it's dry-clean only." Slap Yer Face



DESERT RATS VS. AFRIKA KORPS

PUBLISHER GSP White Label WEBSITE www.gsonline.co.uk PRICE £4.99

BY DEFINITION, THE desert is the armpit of the planet; very hot and very sweaty, although not quite as influenced by a spray of Right Guard. With nothing to offer but tons of sand, it really makes you wonder why humanity ever chose to fight one another over bits of it. But fight they did, and soon man became an expert at inflicting death in the sand. Now you too, for a mere fiver and without the risk of losing life or limb, can step into the sweltering confines of a desert-based tank in this WWII RTS.

Despite the levels all looking pretty similar, you'll soon discover there are some carefully crafted strategic conundrums to solve, and with no resource collecting, you can also jump straight into the thick of the action.

However, the game's far from perfect, with some diabolical path-finding, awful voice-acting and a smattering of bugs



"Hello? Yes, I'm looking for an oasis..."

PCZONE
61

marring it. Despite that, it's still an enjoyable, strategic and surprisingly accessible RTS.



What a grey day.

COMANCHE 4

PUBLISHER GSP White Label WEBSITE www.gsonline.co.uk PRICE £4.99

AIRWOLF, KNIGHTRIDER AND possibly *Street Hawk*: we don't remember these shows for Hasselhoff et al – it's the cool vehicles that score high on our nostalgia-o-meter.

Back in 2001, *Comanche 4* was the closest thing you'd ever get to re-living the good old days of Hawke, Santini and the legendary chopper itself with its solid action, real 3D environments (wow!) and

mass of enjoyable campaigns. But the game's suffered from exactly the same fate as the series; if you go back and look at it now, it's not nearly as great as you remember, and with *Comanche's* five-year-old graphics, this ageing chopper's probably not got much fight left in it.

PCZONE
48



Like *The English Patient*, with added chopper.

Like *NYPD Blue*, with added chopper.



Like *The Blue Lagoon*, with added chopper.



And the rest...

Old games + cheap prices = budget heaven (or hell)



DELTA FORCE: LAND WARRIOR
£4.99, GSP WHITE LABEL

Six years ago, shooters of this calibre ruled the world: *DF* had great environments (for the time) and excellent sound effects – but even then it had some average graphics, and things haven't held up well over time. A bit like Elizabeth Taylor.

PCZONE
39



TORTUGA: PIRATES OF THE NEW WORLD
£4.99, GSP WHITE LABEL

A watered-down revision of the developers' own *Port Royale* title but complete with pirates, less resource management and more combat, this pirate and trading sim is disappointing stuff. Buy an eye-patch and a stuffed parrot instead.

PCZONE
30



PATRICIAN III: RISE OF THE HANSE
£4.99, GSP WHITE LABEL

Patricia what? We think we remember playing this, and we think it had boats in it or something. The phrase, 'maritime trading in 14th century northern Europe' springs to mind, and to be honest, it scares us. Try *Rome: Total War* instead.

PCZONE
42

PCZONE TOP 5 BUDGET BUYS



1 **FAR CRY**

£9.99, MASTERTRONIC

Better than *HL2*? So some say. The best non-gravity gun shooter of recent years anyway. An island paradise with extra explosions and terrific enemy AI.



2 **BEYOND GOOD & EVIL**

£9.99, FOCUS MULTIMEDIA

Glorious story-telling, engaging gameplay and the greenest lips in gaming-dom make *BG&E* a must-buy. Deep, imaginative, brilliant.



3 **THE CHRONICLES OF RIDDICK: ESCAPE FROM BUTCHER BAY**

£9.99, BESTSELLER

Great melee, sneaky stealth and oodles of lawless violence – not all console conversions are a pile of old poo.



4 **MEDIEVAL: TOTAL WAR – GOLD EDITION**

£9.99, MASTERTRONIC

A true classic, *Medieval* lets troops do battle in real-time and lets you get tactical in this warfare masterpiece.



5 **WARHAMMER 40K: DOW**

£9.99, FOCUS MULTIMEDIA

Even if you've never heard of the Games Workshop franchise, this *Command & Conquer*-style RTS is great-looking and explosive fun.

COLDLY EXECUTED



26TH MAY 2006

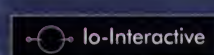
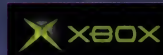
HITMAN

BLOOD  MONEY

www.hitman.com



PlayStation 2



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YOUR SHOUT!

Speak your brains on any game ending in '4'



THE ELDER SCROLLS IV: OBLIVION

OUR SCORE: 95%

I'd like to report a missing person. His name is Soul, first name My. He's about 5ft 7-inches and has a somewhat translucent, cloudy appearance. He was last seen in the province of Cyrodiil, staring in awe at visuals that are pornographically good and listening to some of the best voice-acting in a game ever. Unfortunately, the game then crashed and My Soul was lost in a smouldering heap of dying hardware. Some irritating bugs deprive *Oblivion* of being the best game in existence, but everything else is so nearly perfect that *Half-Life 2* is looking very nervous.

Rick Lane: **96%**

VIRTUAL SKIPPER 4

OUR SCORE: 72%

As a fan of boats and boating, and indeed being a skipper for nearly 20 years, I'd love to recommend *Virtual Skipper 4* as the most realistic boating simulator I've ever played – but it's not that accurate! Boat surfaces are designed to stop people slipping in wet weather, but it's not 100% efficient and people often have accidents. This doesn't happen in *Virtual Skipper 4*, unfortunately...

Captain Reynolds: **74%**

CIVILIZATION IV

OUR SCORE: 92%

All *Civilization* games are the enemy of my spare time – how am I expected to live and play too? My recent progression into fatherhood (little Louis, doing fine ta) stopped me from receiving my annual *Civilization* fix. Recently though, I've been able to indulge myself once more, and oh my, it's fantastic.

Review of the Month



THE ELDER SCROLLS IV: OBLIVION

OUR SCORE: 95%

I have to say, I've never been so taken in by a game since the first time I played *Doom* or *Marathon*. *Oblivion*'s graphics are astounding, the music and sound effects are brilliant and the gameplay is like no other RPG I've ever played. The diversity of the missions are excellent too, as are the characters you meet and the character you create. But all these things aren't what make me want to play it.

What it comes down to is the sheer immersion you get from playing *Oblivion*. Be it creeping round a castle at night looking for a Countess's ring (not that kind...) or riding on horseback across the open fields in the middle of the day, not a minute went by where I thought to myself 'this is getting boring'. In fact, it wasn't until I was around five hours into the game that I realised how truly brilliant it was – but it was also about then that I realised it didn't feel like a game, it felt like an adventure.

The only bad thing is that I have a dissertation to write and this game is stopping me from doing it – so it does have its downsides.

Nick Jones: **100%**



The introduction of religion has introduced a whole new level of depth to my strategic planning, and the new and improved multiplayer is an absolute blessing from the godly Sid Meier. No

other game can boast of having such uplifting intro music, as well as Spock providing a voiceover. All I can say is bring on *Civilization IV: Warlords*.

Bruce Gascoigne: **95%**

YOU DO THE REVIEWS!

Agree? Disagree? Well, the world wouldn't be the wonderful place it was if we all thought the same way. If you fancy sharing your own thoughts with your fellow readers, then jot them down (we find the recent advancements in parchment and ink technology to be handy), trim the amount of words to a MAXIMUM of 100, add a score out of 100 then send them to the address below. If we think they're worthy of sharing, we'll print them here. Better yet, one of you each month will be awarded our coveted Review Of The Month award and showered with a gift of some description.

Send your reviews to: yourshout@pczone.co.uk, or stick them in an envelope and post them to: PC ZONE, Your Shout, Future Publishing, 2 Balcombe Street, London, NW1 6NW.



BUYER'S GUIDE



The bestest games your money can buy...

PCZONE TOP 5 GAMES BEGINNING WITH 'B'

- 1 **BLACK & WHITE**
PCZ ISSUE: 100
- 2 **BIOFORCE**
PCZ ISSUE: 25
- 3 **BATTLEFIELD 2**
PCZ ISSUE: 157
- 4 **BLACK & WHITE 2**
PCZ ISSUE: 161
- 5 **BATTLE ISLE 3: SHADOW OF THE EMPEROR**
PCZ ISSUE: 33

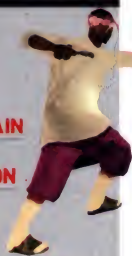


PCZONE TOP 5 VEHICLES IN GAMES

- 1 **ANY BIKE (GTA: VICE CITY)**
PCZ ISSUE: 131
- 2 **MANTA (UT2004)**
PCZ ISSUE: 138
- 3 **WARTHOG (HALO)**
PCZ ISSUE: 135
- 4 **HANG-GLIDER (FAR CRY)**
PCZ ISSUE: 140
- 5 **X-WING (X-WING)**
PCZ ISSUE: 2

PCZONE TOP 5 CONTROVERSIAL GAMES

- 1 **DOOM**
- 2 **POSTAL 2: SHARE THE PAIN**
- 3 **CARMAGEDDON**
- 4 **MANHUNT**
- 5 **GRAND THEFT AUTO**



Shooters

Must buy!



HALF-LIFE 2

PCZ Issue: 148 - 97%

Everyone knew this would be good, but no-one quite expected the tour de force that Valve managed to pull off. Easily a contender for the best game of all time, *Half-Life 2* is just one stunning set-piece after another, and is guaranteed to leave you dribbling with awe. Be warned though, a (fast) online connection is needed for Valve's mandatory Steam delivery service.



BATTLEFIELD 2

PCZ Issue: 157 - 94%

If it's online action you want, look no further. *BF2* sets the gold standard for team-based shooting, with huge 64-player maps, squad and commander modes and the best graphics ever. Just make sure you have a ninja PC.



BUDGET

FAR CRY

PCZ Issue: 140 - 93%

In many eyes, Crytek's shooter outweighs even the mighty *Half-Life 2* in its tension, tactics and expansive level design. It's a mighty achievement with seemingly freeform action and the best sniping money can buy.



CALL OF DUTY 2

PCZ Issue: 162 - 91%

Brutal, relentless and totally gripping, the WWII shooter sequel packs more action into a single level than most pack into an entire game. Epic scale battles and intense drama. World War II at its unforgiving best.



UNREAL TOURNAMENT 2004

PCZ Issue: 138 - 91%

UT2004 packs so much punch, you'd be hard pushed to find a flaw. Team games, deathmatches, tactical thinking in the Onslaught mode - everything the sci-fi shoot 'em up fan could want,



F.E.A.R.

PCZ Issue: 160 - 90%

With more shocks and scares than an episode of *Revenge* (and a much higher body count), *F.E.A.R.* pushes the shooter part of FPS to the limit. It might not be the scariest game ever, but it will make you jump.



GHOST RECON: ADVANCED WARFIGHTER

PCZ Issue: 169 - 90%

The *Ghost Recon* series makes a forceful return to the PC. Atmospheric and beautiful to behold, the tactical shooter masters level design and AI, creating an FPS to challenge and astound.

Strategy

Must buy!



ROME: TOTAL WAR

PCZ Issue: 148 - 93%

Once upon a time, all strategy games were visual abortions and strictly for the hardcore (OK, a bit of a sweeping statement). But *Rome: Total War* changed all that, mixing breathtaking 3D with troop numbers reminiscent of a Hollywood epic, as well as staggering historical accuracy. The result is a masterpiece and a game just about anyone can enjoy. Hell, how many other titles are made into TV shows?



CIVILIZATION IV

PCZ Issue: 162 - 92%

A Buyer's Guide without a *Civ* game would be a sorry, sorry place, and luckily the latest version does the business with aplomb. Violent Buddhist Romans take over the world.



RISE OF NATIONS: RISE OF LEGENDS

PCZ Issue: 168 - 91%

Takes the great gameplay of *RON*, improves on it with elements from *Civ IV* and *Total War* and wraps the whole lot in a gorgeous sci-fi setting. An RTS bursting with innovation and imagination.



LOTR: THE BATTLE FOR MIDDLE-EARTH

PCZ Issue: 149 - 91%

Although the *LOTR* RTS doesn't hold a candle to the *Total War* franchise, there's nothing quite like ordering a Balin around for guaranteed strategy fun.



SOLDIERS: HEROES OF WORLD WAR II

PCZ Issue: 144 - 90%

The strategy of *Commandos* meets the fun of *Cannon Fodder* in this top-down game of tactics. Being the underdog has never been so much fun, and the rumble of tanks never so worrying.



RISE OF NATIONS

PCZ Issue: 129 - 90%

One of the best of the 'last generation' of empire-builders, *Rise of Nations* - coupled with exemplary expansion pack *Thrones and Patriots* - is a uniquely satisfying and addictive treatment of the *Civ* genre.



STAR WARS: EMPIRE AT WAR

PCZ Issue: 166 - 86%

A brilliant real-time tactical map and amazing space conflicts makes *Empire At War* the best *Star Wars* RTS ever. It's only let down by its land battles - otherwise, it's beyond reproach.

Action/Adventure

Must buy!



MAX PAYNE 2: THE FALL OF MAX PAYNE

PCZ Issue: 136 - 93%

The chosen poison for certain PCZ staffers after a long hard day, *Payne's* second outing is perhaps the most pixel-perfect example of joy-through-excessive-destruction on the market. Slicker than slick, breathtaking and quite beautiful, *Max Payne 2* provides the greatest gaming kicks that money can buy. It's extremely short, but so tense, well designed and replayable that you just won't care.



GRAND THEFT AUTO: SAN ANDREAS

PCZ Issue: 155 - 92%

To think that the simple top-down car game has turned into this - a work of creative genius. Violent, brutal, smutty, freeform and hilarious - *San Andreas* is the summit of gaming achievement.



SPLINTER CELL: CHAOS THEORY

PCZ Issue: 154 - 91%

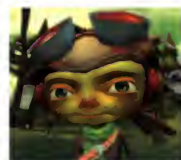
A tour de force from Ubisoft, *Chaos Theory* takes the *Splinter Cell* format and runs with it in solo, co-op and the now well-established spies vs mercenaries multiplayer. Smooth, lithe and good with a knife.



FAHRENHEIT

PCZ Issue: 159 - 90%

Murder most foul, with you as the killer. This twisting, turning, brilliantly-told plot features multiple character control, split-screen tension, branching scenes and several endings. From the brains behind *The Nomad Soul*.



PSYCHONAUTS

PCZ Issue: 156 - 90%

Clever, witty, impeccably detailed and absolutely off its rocker - *Psychonauts* is proof that the anarchic edge of LucasArts hasn't completely left us. A slightly flawed game in some respects, but still a dazzling feat.



BEYOND GOOD & EVIL

PCZ Issue: 138 - 89%

We heap praise on this game on a monthly basis, but it's for a reason. Michel Ancel's superb journey through the strange land of Hillis is nothing short of storytelling magic. It's cheap now, so go out and buy it.



PRINCE OF PERSIA: THE TWO THRONES

PCZ Issue: 164 - 86%

The shirtless wonder finally makes it into the Buyer's Guide, not that any of his outings can be considered bad games. *TTT* manages to get all the ingredients just right this time.

MMOs



WORLD OF WARCRAFT
PCZ Issue: 152 - 95%
Blizzard's recreation of the classic strategy world in MMO form doesn't disappoint. Beautiful to look at, absorbing to play and with more content than you can shake a magic stick at.



EVERQUEST II
PCZ Issue: 150 - 95%
A *Star Trek* to *WOW*'s *Star Wars*, *EQII* gives the original a much needed lick of paint, a whole new world to play in and a greater sense of depth and immersion. A time-sink in the true, classic sense.



GUILD WARS
PCZ Issue: 156 - 94%
How to make a gaming genre accessible to the masses. It shines with polish, thought and lack of monthly subscription fees. Newbies can feel at home too, thanks to a totally skills-based set-up.



EVE ONLINE
PCZ Issue: 130 - 88%
Elite online has been a long-held fantasy and this space sim is the closest yet to making it a reality. Its slow pace belies the options on offer, from mining or trading to piracy - it's up to you.



CITY OF HEROES
PCZ Issue: 155 - 86%
Nothing beats the feeling of spandex and fire-beams shooting from your eyes. This super-powered MMO lets you live all those heroic dreams to the full. Nietzsche would have a field day.

Simulation



X3: REUNION
PCZ Issue: 162 - 92%
Finally, a space sim to better *X2: The Threat*, and it just happens to be the sequel. Possibly the best-looking game ever to appear on a PC. Plus, it plays well too.



IL-2 STURMOVIK: FORGOTTEN BATTLES
PCZ Issue: 128 - 92%
While flight sims are becoming rarer and rarer, at least the quality remains high. None more so than this ultra-classy WWII combat sim. Chocks away, comrade!



MICROSOFT FLIGHT SIMULATOR 2004: A CENTURY OF FLIGHT
PCZ Issue: 133 - 89%
No, you don't shoot things, no there's no mission structure, yes there's the best non-combat flight experience to date. History can be fun.



FREELANCER
PCZ Issue: 128 - 84%
If *X2* is too slow for you, *Freelancer* should fit the bill. Plenty of trading, bounty-hunting and space piracy, but with the emphasis on action rather than realism. Space has never been this much fun.



FALCON 4.0
PCZ Issue: 158 - 82%
An example of fanbase enthusiasm saving a once-dead series, *Falcon 4.0* lives on thanks to the dedication of its hard-working players. The best modern-day fighter sim on the market.

Driving/Racing



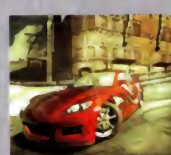
GT LEGENDS
PCZ Issue: 161 - 92%
While *GTR* takes care of modern-day racing, *GT Legends* does the business for historical driving. A natural successor to *Grand Prix Legends*, it's like the swinging '60s never ended.



GTR
PCZ Issue: 153 - 90%
As real as it gets. Probably. The complete driving solution on a PC, with all the drifting, shunting and racing you need. Invest in a decent force-feedback steering wheel and pedals set-up though.



LIVE FOR SPEED
PCZ Issue: 158 - 90%
Realistic handling, hilarious crashes and a racing community second to none. On the right servers that is. A remarkable achievement by such a small team.



NEED FOR SPEED: MOST WANTED
PCZ Issue: 163 - 88%
Thrill-packed racer from EA, this time with the emphasis on high-speed police chases and notoriety factors. You can still make like Westwood with the car pinging though.



TOCA RACE DRIVER 3
PCZ Issue: 165 - 85%
If you're into cars, this is about as essential as petrol. With a massive collection of 35 motorsport genres, a great damage engine and realistic tracks, there's plenty of mileage in this superb racer.

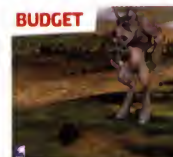
God games



THE MOVIES
PCZ Issue: 162 - 95%
Life as a movie mogul, games don't get better than this. Not only a god/management game par excellence, but also a complete home movie-making kit. Brilliant.



BLACK & WHITE 2
PCZ Issue: 161 - 93%
The original split opinion, and this sequel does the same. We love it though, and think it's erased all the problems as well as adding plenty of new options to boot. It's gorgeous too.



BLACK & WHITE
PCZ Issue: 150 - 90%
Lionhead's controversial vision brought out your good/bad side and featured an ambitious mix of role-playing, strategy and great AI. It can now be yours for a mere fiver, making it a god among mortals.



EVIL GENIUS
PCZ Issue: 147 - 84%
Ever wanted to say "No Mr Bond, I expect you to die", or create giant evil lairs inside hollow volcanoes? Well now you can with this great megalomaniac sim. It's always fun being bad.



VEGAS: MAKE IT BIG
PCZ Issue: 135 - 84%
An in-depth tycoon game with all the 3D graphical glitz and glamour of Vegas itself. Provide hotels, casinos and over-priced magic shows that suck the money out of the punters.

Sport



PRO EVOLUTION SOCCER 5
PCZ Issue: 161 - 93%
Football, football, football. Morning, noon and night. The beautiful game in a beautiful game. Not only the best version of *Pro Evo* ever, also the best footy game ever.



FOOTBALL MANAGER 2006
PCZ Issue: 162 - 90%
One year on and the best footy management game is even better. Quick Tactics, half-time team talks, physio reports - changes are small but add up to a terrific whole.



TIGER WOODS PGA TOUR 2006
PCZ Issue: 161 - 85%
Travel through time playing Tiger Woods throughout history. Only in an EA Sports game. *Tiger 06* is the best PC golf game yet, mainly thanks to the two career modes.



NHL 06
PCZ Issue: 160 - 84%
Ice hockey may not be the UK's number one sporting pastime, but that doesn't make EA Sports' incarnation of it any less fun. Exciting, breathless and violent ball-out fun for the whole family.



MADDEN 2005
PCZ Issue: 152 - 84%
Although the 2006 version is now upon us, this is actually the better option (at least until 2007 arrives). In truth, there's little to differ between the versions, but this one just feels more fluid.

RPGs



THE ELDER SCROLLS IV: OBLIVION
PCZ Issue: 167 - 95%
Oblivion's sublime graphics, intuitive character-creation and massive freeform gameplay put paid to the myth that you have to own a beard to enjoy RPGs.



KNIGHTS OF THE OLD REPUBLIC
PCZ Issue: 137 - 94%
KOTOR is the best *Star Wars* game of recent years. Moving, dramatic and fairly adult in tone, it also has a hefty dose of lightsabers to keep you happy.



THE ELDER SCROLLS III: MORROWIND
PCZ Issue: 116 - 94%
Possibly the most intimidating, yet wonderful game we've played - the breadth and depth of *Morrowind* remains a remarkable achievement.



DEUS EX
PCZ Issue: 93 - 94%
This remains the benchmark in FPS RPGs. Twisting sci-fi plots, exciting freeform levels and some moments of pure exhilaration and drama help retain *Deus Ex* as the alpha male of the gaming world.



NEVERWINTER NIGHTS
PCZ Issue: 118 - 91%
It may not have the depth of *Fallout*, but the customisation options in this are so extensive that it's been granted a very long life. Still a wonderfully immersive game.

INCOMING!

All approximate monthly dates are correct at the time of going to press

July & August

CIVILIZATION IV: WARLORDS
CIVICITY: ROME
FACES OF WAR
HELLGATE: LONDON
PARAWORLD
PREY
ROME: TOTAL WAR - ALEXANDER

2K GAMES
2K GAMES
UBISOFT
NAMCO
DEEP SILVER
2K GAMES
SEGA

Q3/Q4

AGE OF EMPIRES III: WARCHIEFS
BATTLEFIELD 2142
COMPANY OF HEROES
DARK MESSIAH OF MIGHT & MAGIC
ENEMY TERRITORY: QUAKE WARS
FEAR: EXTRACTION POINT
GOTHIC 3
JUST CAUSE
THE LORD OF THE RINGS ONLINE
MIDDLE-EARTH: THE RINGS ONLINE
NEVERWINTER NIGHTS 2
SPLINTER CELL: DOUBLE AGENT
STRONGHOLD: LEGENDS
UNREAL TOURNAMENT 2007
WARHAMMER: MARK OF CHAOS
WORLD OF WARCRAFT: THE BURNING CRUSADE

MICROSOFT
EA
THQ
UBISOFT
ACTIVISION
VU GAMES
JOWOOD
EIDOS
CODEMASTERS
SEGA
ATARI
UBISOFT
2K GAMES
MIDWAY
NAMCO
VU GAMES

2007

ALAN WAKE
BIOSHOCK
CRYSIS
FALLOUT 3
MEDAL OF HONOR: AIRBORNE
SPORE

MICROSOFT
2K GAMES
EA
BETHESDA
EA
EA

New ways to
discover the best new games

read

see the

score

learn

chat

get so

will

save



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**A Link To
The Future**

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Super Smash Bros. Brawl Super Mario Galaxy
Metroid Prime 3 Sonic Wild Fire WarioWare



New issue

OUT NOW





PCZONE

HARDWARE

Better gaming through technology

Short is sweet

HARDWARE REVIEWS ON the Web have become so huge these days, that it's

not uncommon to click through 20 pages describing a single graphics card in a level of detail normally reserved for pharmaceutical research papers. A card that, to all intents and purposes, is no different from any other on the market.

Maybe you get a leather CD-ROM wallet with 'Super Dog Panic' stuffed inside it, but it's fundamentally nothing more than a graphics card – one of a number of components that form the guts of your PC.

Compare something truly complex and more subjective, like a Mercedes-Benz S-Class or perhaps the collected works of Arthur Schopenhauer, and the reviews you'll find won't break a single page. Plus, there won't be any line graphs or histograms your maths lecturer wouldn't understand.

A recent trend has been to highlight the different way ATI and NVIDIA cards render games. Reviewers now leap upon the slightest variation in image quality, despite the fact it's of importance to fewer than three people (none of whom could be trusted near farmyard animals).

We want these games to run smoothly and reliably. We don't care whether a GeForce card makes a certain texture look different, or whether we get a new Radeon driver every month. As long as the end result is enjoyable, we're happy.

Wandy

Phil Wand, hardware editor

OVERCOOKED!

Durability of factory-tweaked hardware brought into question

THERE'S NO SUCH thing as a free lunch, especially when it's your graphics card that's doing the cooking. Well, we added that last bit but it's true.

A little while back, a handful of hardware sites reported odd problems with overclocked GeForce 7900-based cards from BFGTech, EVGA and XFX, all of which are sold in this country. Visual artefacts and long pauses revealed that something wasn't quite right, and that factory tweaks were the most likely culprit. The director of technical marketing at EVGA eventually posted to the [H]ard[O]CP forums, saying that his company "needs to improve its

quality control and tighten testing procedures."

If you have a long memory, you may recall my distrust of overclocking. The reason NVIDIA provide a recommended specification for their cards is because they know what their cards are capable of, and that mucking about with the proper numbers will only end in tears. Set the wrong clocks on your 7900 GT and you'll have trouble on your hands in the long run.

Interestingly, further research has revealed that a number of vendors are actually slowing their clocked products down in order to make them stable with the headline numbers on the back of the box. So could this spell the end of factory overclocking? No, it's not likely. It's more like a kick up the arse for complacent Q&A departments at BFGTech, EVGA and XFX.



Who burned the toast?



SOCKET WRENCH

AMD processors moved to new socket

AMD HAVE ANNOUNCED that 13 of its existing processors will make the transition from 939-pin to socket AM2, as well as two brand new products. But along with a new AM2 motherboard, you'll need to buy new memory. The processors use a common 333MHz controller, so you'll need to eBay your existing RAM and replace it with DDR2-667 sticks.

The move to socket AM2 brings only the tiniest of performance gains, but if you're minted, you'll be able to treat yourself



Careful, don't break the mirror.

to a £500 X2 5000+ or to the £750 FX-62 processor – the two fastest desktop chips money can buy.

NEWS ROUND-UP

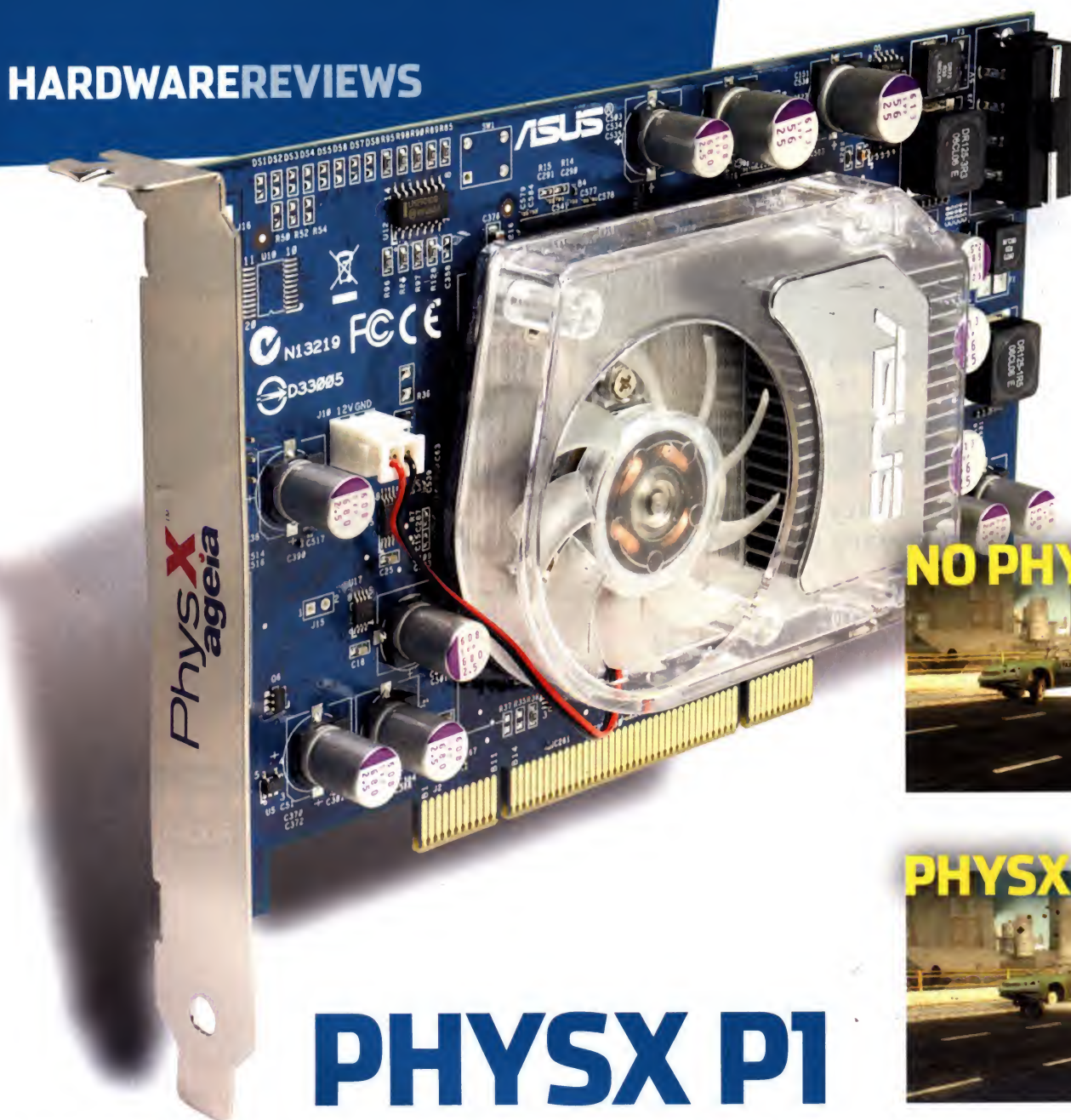
The launch of NVIDIA GX2 hardware – twin GeForce cards stuck together on the same card and capable of outperforming any existing single slot product – could mean drastic price cuts for the company's existing flagship products. The 7900 GT and GTX are likely to head into the £150-£250 bracket, so if you're in the mood to buy high-end, hold on. If you have money to burn, you'll be delighted to hear that two GX2 cards in SLI will give you quad power and the ability to run your games with liquid smoothness at 1600x1200. Shame you need to spend just as much money on the monitor needed to display it. www.nvidia.com

ATI have claimed their console-thrashing R600 processor will be the 'fastest thing the company has ever made', which isn't really saying anything – every new generation has been more powerful than the previous one. You'll be able to buy the technology inside DX10 products later this year, and although the R600 work with XP and the current crop of DX9 games, you'll need Windows Vista to get your money's worth. www.ati.com

WARNING:
THIS MONTH'S
HARD WORDS

BY STEVE HOGARTY

DDR2-667: My high score in *Dance Dance Revolution 2*, before I hyperventilate and fall over. **PARTITION WIZARD:** A magical man with a pointy hat, commissioned to lay out office spaces. **NOD32:** ...And he's well on his way to breaking the World Nodding Record. **26-DIGIT HEX:** The end result of pissing off a witch over the Internet. Particularly difficult to remove. **VOYAGER 2000:** Big spaceship, Klingons sometimes on it, people with papier maché foreheads, snug-fitting uniforms and toast coming out of ATMs. **MAXFIRE:** The type of fire most feared by firemen. MaxFire can climb walls, command animals to do its bidding, and disguise itself as packs of Panini trading cards.



NO PHYSX



PHYSX



PHYSX P1

FIVE REASONS WE'RE NOT SURE ABOUT PHYSX

- 1 Multiplayer. Yes, *UT2007* has support for the PPU, but you can't play PhysX multiplayer unless your opponent as PhysX too. Great.
- 2 Boring. Kicking over chairs in Source games became pretty tedious pretty quickly. Are physics that interesting in the first place?
- 3 Price. At over £200, the PhysX card is a minority indulgence. It needs to be less than half that price to conquer the mass market.
- 4 Crysis. Crytek has confirmed its stunner won't support PhysX. Everything that makes your jaw drop is handled by CPU and GPU.
- 5 Vista. Dual-core processors and DirectX 10 cards should deliver all the thrills you need come this time next year.

PRICE £210 MANUFACTURER ASUS WEBSITE uk.asus.com

MY IDEA OF A physics demo is a big gun, infinite ammo and easy targets. Plenty of noise, a monsoon of bullets and severed arms and legs bouncing off nearby walls. Maybe some guts and bowels. Fingers and toes. Bodies turned to mince like a chainsaw through meat. Everything in your view can be twisted, distorted or pulled apart, and when you've had enough, you can use the wet end of a thigh to write bad words on the ground or play 'guess the torso' with a lopped off head.

AGEIA's idea of a physics demo involves a ball and a stack of brightly-coloured bricks. You throw the ball at the bricks, and the bricks collapse in what I swear is the least realistic fashion I've ever witnessed. At this point you've spent your money, fitted the card, installed the drivers and you'll have a good mind to cram everything back in the box and stick it on eBay with the title 'unwanted gift'.

But wait, what of the commercial demos? Well, the Cellfactor teaser wouldn't work properly on my test machine,

presenting an acid trip of badly clipped polygons where the game should have been. Installing the thing on a second PC revealed it to be nothing but physics and overcooked visuals, making the whole experience predictably joyless. *Ghost Recon: Advanced Warfighter* was also major-league disappointing, and by the time I'd refitted the card and reinstalled the drivers to make doubly sure the card was actually working, I felt like crying.

VISUAL FIZZLE

In essence, the PhysX effects in *GRAV* boil down to extra bits of crap which fly out from explosions. The debris has a detrimental effect on your frame-rate and looks slightly surreal: take airburst grenades, which with the PhysX card enabled spray out in a peculiar Hollywood-style slow-motion. The particles float unnaturally for a second or two and then just wink out. No, they do not bounce at your feet. No, the smoke doesn't waft and billow. There are precisely none of the effects you might have hoped for.

The PhysX card may prove itself to be something truly staggering over the coming months, but here and now it's a pointless way of spending £200. Nothing I've seen does the hardware any justice – the AGEIA chip is capable of 20 billion instructions per second – and you're far better off buying a decent set of 5.1 speakers and turning the volume up high. That's a far better way of making your games really zing. **PCW**



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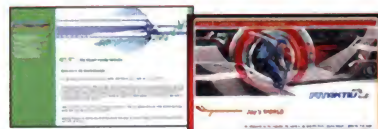


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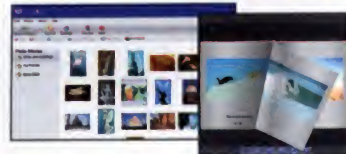
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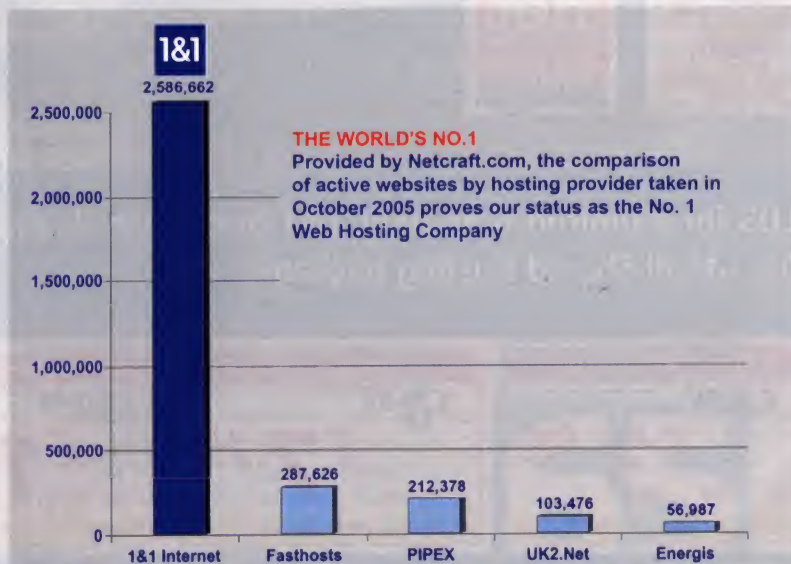
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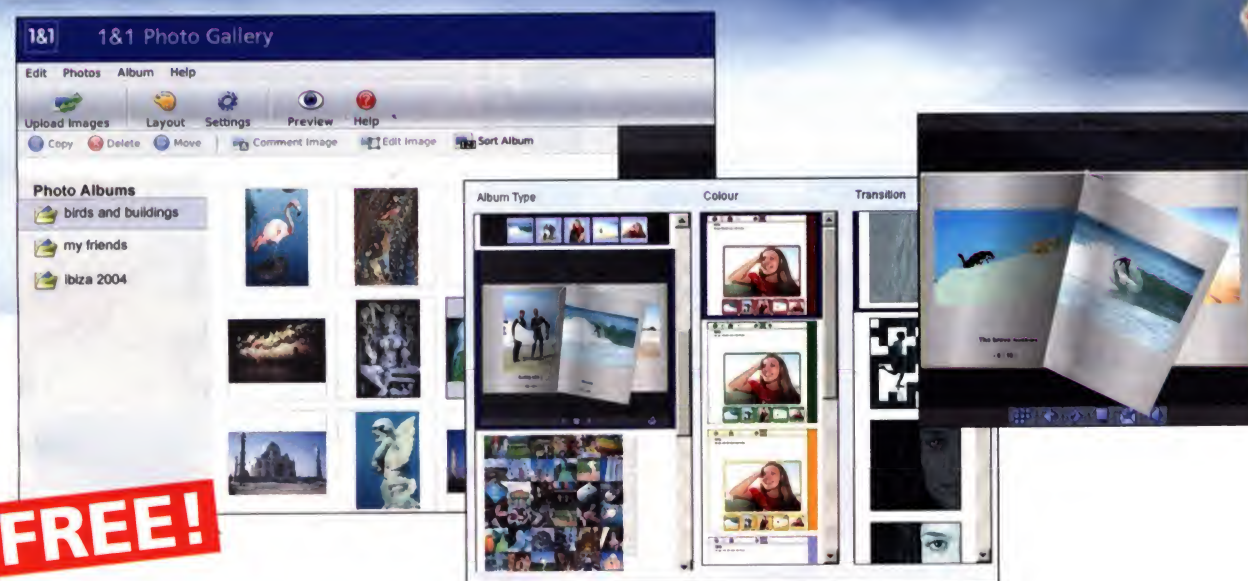


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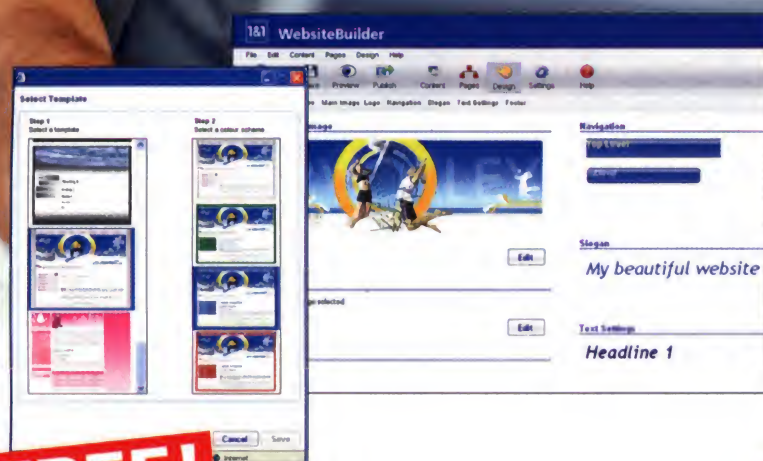
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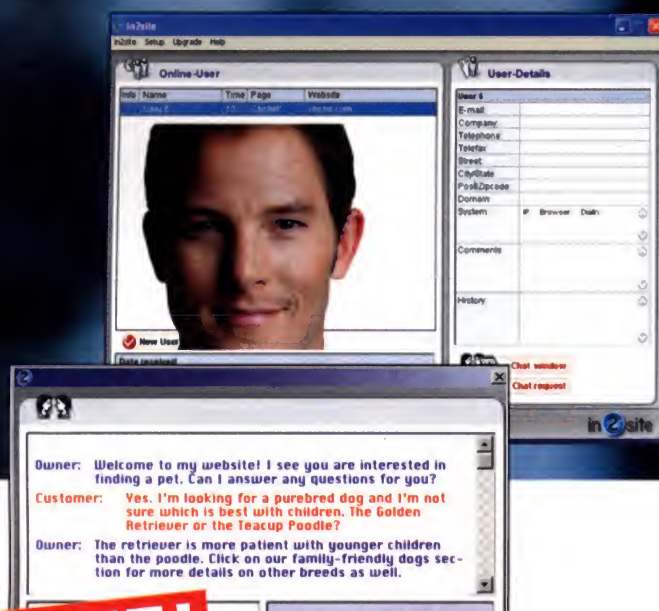
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A screenshot of a 'Contact' form. It has fields for 'Name' (filled with 'Samantha Barnes'), 'E-Mail', and 'Message'. The message field contains the text: 'Please can you contact me regarding the villa booking, ref. 31208997. Many thanks'.A screenshot of an 'Event Registration' form. It has fields for 'Your Name' (filled with 'Rachel Peard'), 'E-Mail', 'I'll come' (with radio buttons for 'Sure!' and 'No, I'm sorry.'), 'Number of persons' (filled with '2'), and 'Space for Messages' (filled with 'Hi, Can't wait for your party. See you then! Rachel').A screenshot of an 'Invitation to:' form. It has a title 'Photo Exhibit', 'Hosted by: Susan Howard', 'Where: Impressions Gallery', and 'Where: 29 Hannover Square, London'. Below this is a photo of a man and fields for 'Your Name' (filled with 'Stephen Bradshaw') and 'Address'.

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newsletter

No. 12/January 2006

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■ Full Version Software worth £400	✓	✓
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■ Ready-to-run CGI library	✓	✓
■ ASP Scripting supported	—	✓
■ ASP.NET, .NET Framework	—	✓
■ PHP3, 4 & 5, Perl & Free CGI's	✓	—

NEW ■ Database	2 MySQL	MS Access
■ SSI (Server Side Includes)	✓	✓

DOMAIN NAMES

■ Included .co.uk domains	3	3
■ Sub-domains	300	300
■ Complete DNS Management	✓	✓

E-MAIL

■ IMAP/POP3 e-mail accounts	700	700
■ Autoresponders/e-mail aliases	✓	✓
■ 1&1 Webmail	✓	✓
■ Virus scanning for accounts	10 Acc.	10 Acc.
■ Spam Filtering	✓	✓

SECURITY FEATURES

■ Protected by up-to-date Firewall	✓	✓
■ Daily backups	✓	✓
■ Password protection	✓	✓
■ Shared SSL or optional dedicated SSL Certificate	✓	✓

EXPRESS SUPPORT

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■ Online account management	✓	✓

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■ 1&1 WebSpaceExplorer/Webfiles	✓	✓

MARKETING TOOLS

	✓	✓
■ In2Site Live Dialogue	10	10
■ Chat Channels	✓	✓
■ 1&1 WebStatistics	✓	✓
■ 1&1 WebElements	✓	✓
■ 1&1 Newsletter Tool	✓	✓
■ 1&1 WebDatabase	✓	✓
■ Customisable Forums	✓	✓

WEBSITE BUILDING TOOLS

NEW	1&1 Dynamic Content	✓	✓
■ 1&1 WebsiteBuilder	25 pgs	25 pgs	
■ 1&1 Photo Gallery	✓	✓	
■ 1&1 DynamicSiteCreator	25 pgs	25 pgs	
■ Personal Merchandise Shop	✓	✓	
■ 1&1 Multimedia Archive	✓	✓	
■ Full Version Software worth £400	✓	✓	
■ FrontPage Extensions supported	✓	✓	
■ Ready-to-run CGI library	✓	✓	
■ ASP Scripting supported	–	✓	
■ ASP.NET, .NET Framework	–	✓	
■ PHP3, 4 & 5, Perl & Free CGI's	✓	–	

NEW	Database MS Access, (8x MySQL, MS Access/2x MS SQL)	8 MySQL	2 MS SQL
■ SQL Import	–	✓	✓
■ SSI (Server Side Includes)	✓	✓	✓
■ Cron Jobs	✓	–	–

DOMAIN NAMES

	5	5
■ Included .co.uk domains	1,500	1,500
■ Sub-domains	✓	✓
■ Complete DNS Management	✓	✓

E-MAIL

	1,500	1,500
■ IMAP/POP3 e-mail accounts	✓	✓
■ Auto-responders/e-mail aliases	✓	✓
■ 1&1 Webmail	✓	✓
■ Virus scanning for accounts	20 Acc.	20 Acc.
■ Spam Filtering	✓	✓

SECURITY FEATURES

	✓	✓
■ Protected by up-to-date Firewall	✓	✓
■ Daily backups	✓	✓
■ Password protection	✓	✓
■ Shared SSL or optional dedicated SSL Certificate	✓	✓
■ SSH Access	✓	–

EXPRESS SUPPORT

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■ FTP access accounts	80 GB	80 GB
■ Monthly Traffic included	✓	✓
■ 1&1 Control Panel	✓	✓
■ Server Priority	✓	✓
■ 1&1 WebSpaceExplorer/Webfiles	✓	✓

MARKETING TOOLS

	✓	✓
■ In2Site Live Dialogue	25	25
■ Chat Channels	✓	✓
■ 1&1 WebStatistics	✓	✓
■ 1&1 WebElements	✓	✓
■ 1&1 Newsletter Tool	✓	✓
■ 1&1 WebDatabase	✓	✓
■ Customisable Forums	✓	✓

WEBSITE BUILDING TOOLS

NEW	1&1 Dynamic Content	✓	✓
■ 1&1 WebsiteBuilder	30 pgs	30 pgs	
■ 1&1 Photo Gallery	✓	✓	
■ 1&1 DynamicSiteCreator	25 pgs	25 pgs	
■ Personal Merchandise Shop	✓	✓	
■ Full Version Software worth £400	✓	✓	
■ FrontPage Extensions supported	✓	✓	
■ Ready-to-run CGI library	✓	✓	
■ ASP Scripting supported	–	✓	
■ ASP.NET, .NET Framework	–	✓	
■ PHP3, 4 & 5, Perl & Free CGI's	✓	–	

NEW	Database (15x MySQL, MS Access/3x MS SQL)	15 MySQL	MS Access, 3 MS SQL
■ SQL Import	–	✓	✓
■ SSI (Server Side Includes)	✓	✓	✓
■ Cron Jobs	✓	–	–
■ Advanced Developer Tools	✓	–	–

DOMAIN NAMES

	10	10
■ Included .co.uk domains	3,000	3,000
■ Sub-domains	✓	✓
■ Complete DNS Management	✓	✓

E-MAIL

	3,000	3,000
■ IMAP/POP3 e-mail accounts	✓	✓
■ Auto-responders/e-mail aliases	✓	✓
■ 1&1 Webmail	✓	✓
■ Virus scanning for accounts	100 Acc.	100 Acc.
■ Spam Filtering	✓	✓

SECURITY FEATURES

	✓	✓
■ Protected by up-to-date Firewall	✓	✓
■ Daily backups	✓	✓
■ Password protection	✓	✓
■ Dedicated SSL Certificate	✓	✓
■ SSH Access	–	–

EXPRESS SUPPORT

	✓	✓
■ Free 24/7 Express Support (inc. e-mail)	✓	✓
■ Step-by-step online guides	✓	✓
■ Online account management	✓	✓

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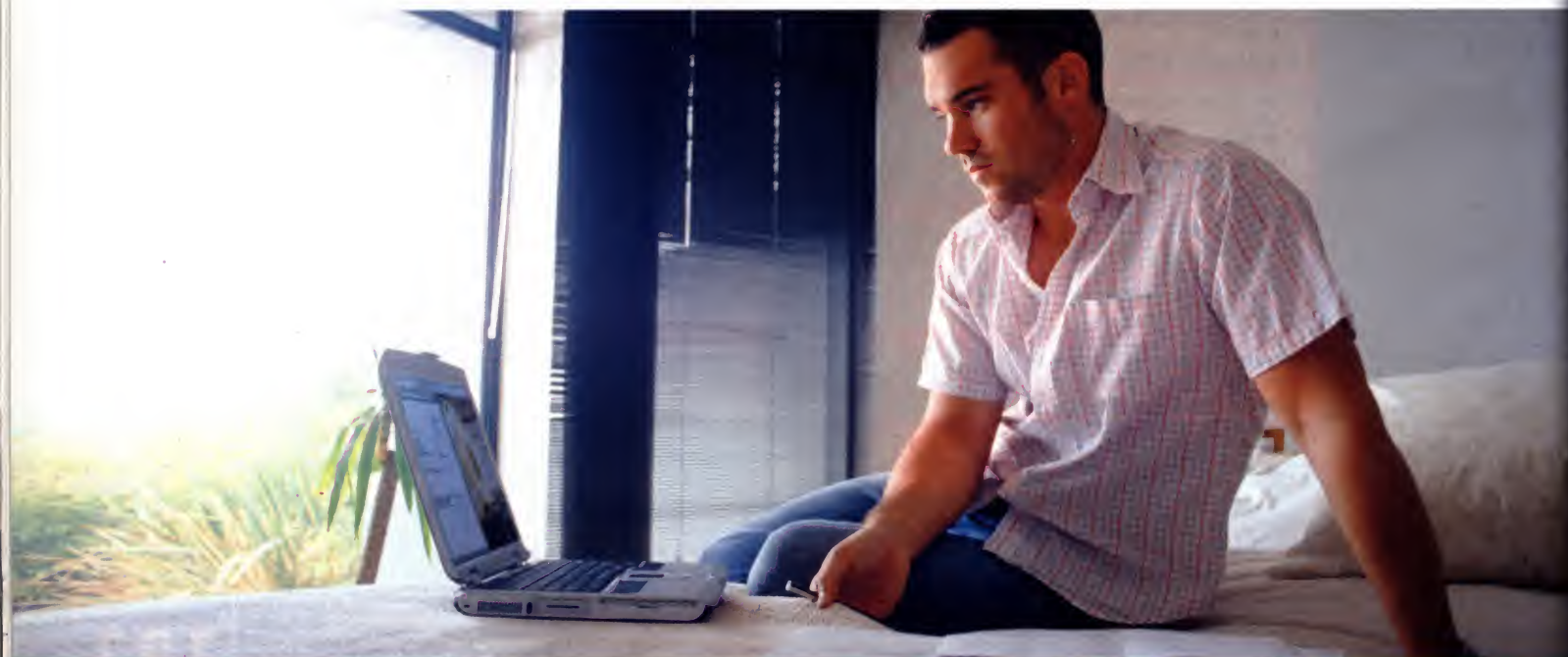
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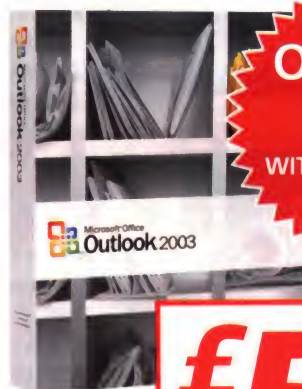
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XWORKS X8A-SLIDC

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YOU MAY RECALL that this Xworks is our brand new and totally official **PC ZONE** review machine, for the official reviewing of games. It was thus exceedingly hard to prize it from the grasp of my colleagues, who stepped between me and it each time I looked like I might take it away for testing. "Do you need it long?" asked Will, hugging it like a child with his teddy bear.

The X8A-SLIDC is built around ASUS's A8N-SLI Premium nForce4 motherboard and AMD's Athlon FX-60 chip – by far and away the world's best platform for high-def, lurch-free gaming. The mainboard is fed by a 460W Zalman noiseless power supply and the processor is cooled by Zalman's AeroFlower unit, meaning the machine is so quiet alongside less powerful rivals that you could believe it was wrapped in a special

noise-cancelling duvet filled with feathers plucked from sound-deadening birds. Left at the Windows desktop, it's no more noisy than a hole in the ground.

Our purebred is fitted with Gainward's 7900 GT Bliss Golden Sample Goes Like Hell Edition, which despite the idiotic name is actually faster than the 7900 GTX thanks to tweaked clocks and 1.1ns premium memory. We have yet to find a game which makes it feel anything less than hydraulically smooth at any detail level. Even *Oblivion* is deliciously fluid.

All in all, the Xworks is the antithesis of your typical gaming rig: quiet, unobtrusive and almost anonymous, it lacks any circus-style gimcrackery and is all the better for it. It's the PC equivalent of a Q-Car and we're tickled pink with it.

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92



SPECIFICATION

Case Xworks Workstation PSU Zalman 460W Silent Mainboard ASUS A8N-SLI Premium CPU AMD FX-60 GPU NVIDIA GeForce 7900GT 512MB RAM 2GB Samsung PC3200 HDD1 WD 150GB S-ATA Raptor HDD2 Seagate 500GB S-ATA II Optical Pioneer DVR-111D - DVD+/-R/RW/RAM OS Microsoft Windows XP Pro

MAXFIRE WIRELESS G-12X

PRICE £19 MANUFACTURER Genius WEBSITE geniusnet.co.uk

LIKE SO MANY Genius products, the MaxFire pad is cheap, plasticky and will shrug off a lifetime's abuse. I'd not be surprised if it were capable of surviving a direct hit by a Polaris missile on re-entry from space.

My first mouse – we're talking 16 years ago now – was a Genius, and it was still in full working order when I retired it to a box alongside my Amiga, 3DO and 3-inch Amstrad disks. The wireless Genius pad here shares key attributes with my favourite old clicker: it's ugly, it feels like it



was made from material dug up from the 1950s, and yet you warm to it almost instantly.

For just £20, it's brilliant. Use it for driving cars in *Live For Speed* and *rFactor*, or for flying planes in *Battlefield 2*. It's not suited to FPS action, of course, but that never stopped several million stupid console owners from trying.

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88

X1800 GTO

PRICE £130 MANUFACTURER GECUBE WEBSITE gecube.com.tw

THE X1800 GTO WAS made to go head-to-head with the 7600 GT, and is neck and neck with the mid-range GeForce champ in every benchmark. It's not a new card, but it does have a new price. Essentially, it's an X1800 XL with four pipelines pinched off and £50 gone from the RRP.

As much as I'd like to include the X1800 GTO in our Buyer's Guide, it's only available for PCI-Express and as such is useless to the majority of PC owners. Indeed, AGP owners

will look at this sort of card and see nothing but money and aggravation, the newer interface demanding a new motherboard and possibly even a new processor. By the time you've stacked up the cost, you might as well buy a GeForce 7800 GS AGP and leave the major upgrades for when DirectX 10 cards arrive later in the year.

Having said all of that, if you have PCI-Express, it's a total steal.



PCZONE

VALUE • PERFORMANCE



90

HOW TO...

MAKE YOUR PC MULTIBOOT

Need:

Another HDD or HDD partition manager

Time:

1-2 hours

Difficulty level:

Phil Wand

HAL 9000

Medium doofus

Big Brother contestant

Jamie Sefton

Want more than one operating system on your PC? There's more to it than bragging rights – *Phil Wand* explains all...

DON'T SCOFF. HAVING two or more copies of Windows is not just about proving you have no life beyond quarrelling with people on forums and pasting ebaumsworld links to IRC channels. There are some legitimate, non-stupid reasons you might want to have a number of Microsoft operating systems on your PC.

The first reason is that you're a developer. Running more than one instance of Windows allows you to test the software you write in different environments, and to see how it behaves when you deliberately screw around with the underlying OS.

The second is that you're a gamer or Internet junkie who regularly downloads files or opens up email attachments. Doing this sort of thing is not conducive to the long-term stability of your machine, and creating a new Windows install on its own drive allows you to muck about to your heart's content, leaving your C: drive clean and free of such nonsense. Interested? Then keep reading...



A new 80GB hard drive costs less than most games.

01 What you need to know

An operating system is not a gerbil. It's more like a hamster, or maybe a leopard or the striped hyena of south-east Africa (*We get the idea – Zoology Ed*), in that it will savage any other operating system that comes near it. What this means is that you can't go installing Windows on a partition that already has a Windows folder – you'll have to create a whole new drive letter like D: or E: and put it there instead. To achieve this, you need to either buy a new hard drive or divide your existing one with a partition manager. Either option will cost you about £40.



A partition manager is a utility which, among other things, allows you to divide up your hard drive into different disks, thus allowing you to have multiple drive letters on one physical unit. Popular managers include the wonderful Acronis Disk Director Suite and Symantec's Norton PartitionMagic. There's nothing to be gained from doing this unless you're installing multiple operating systems. If all you want to do is store your games in one folder and your porn in another, a partition manager will just overcomplicate matters: simply create different folders for them. The Disk Management Console allows you to view the hard drives attached to your PC, and to create and format partitions on them. It's quite easy to totally screw up your system here, so be careful.

02 Mix and match

If you're a Windows XP user, your best bet is to install XP again to the new partition. While you could go installing Windows 2000, there's little point – you'd not actually gain anything and Microsoft no longer support it anyway. If

you're a Windows 2000 user, you can install either XP or 2000. That said, a growing number of new games exhibit peculiar problems when run under 2000, so my advice would be to choose this as a good time to buy a copy of XP.

Mixing up operating systems makes little sense unless you're a developer.



Microsoft

Windows 2000 Professional

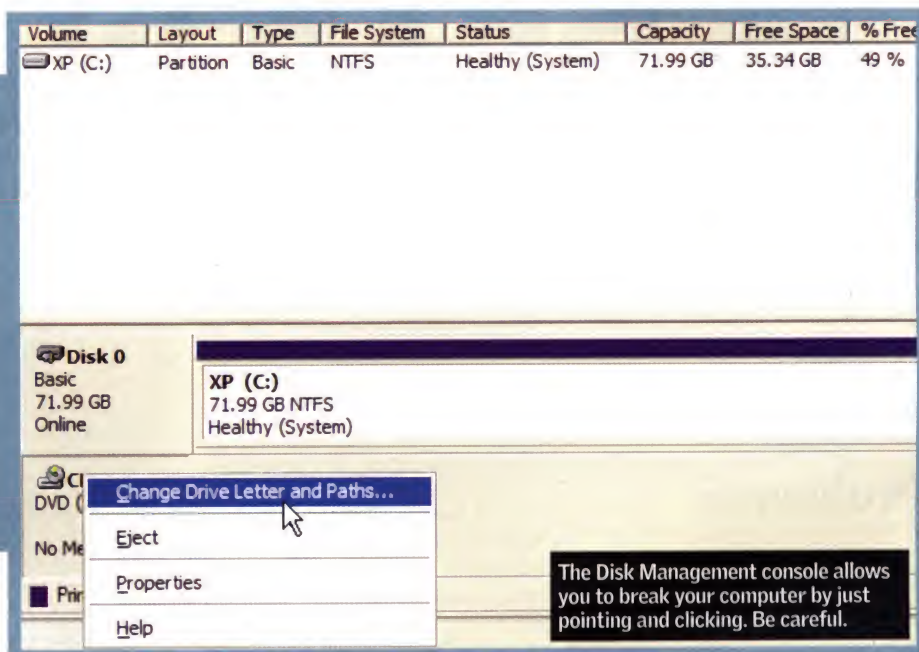
Built on NT Technology

WARNING: DON'T INSTALL OLD VERSIONS

Old versions of Windows – anything prior to Windows 2000, including Windows Me – are seriously, knee-tremblingly awful and should be avoided at all costs. Aside from the fact they'll make your PC more jittery than a horse with a jalapeno rammed up its chuffer, you'll not be able to find drivers for any modern hardware. Windows 98 will in all probability have no clue about your motherboard or GeForce 7900 GTX, or maybe even your damned mouse. Do not install old and crappy operating systems anywhere on your PC unless you're unbalanced and/or stupid.

03 Making ready

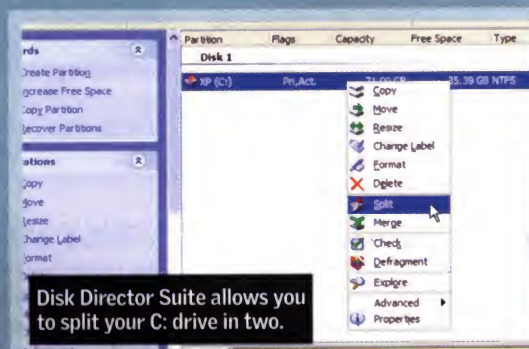
Before we get cracking, open the Windows Disk Management console by clicking Start, Run and then typing diskmgmt.msc. Right-click on your CD-ROM in the lower pane of the Disk Management screen and choose Change Drive Letter from the pop-up menu. We'll be needing at least C: and D: for our two Windows installations, with the possibility of adding more later, so change it to something right out of the way – drive Z: is your safest bet. Once you've done that, you can install your new drive (see issue 162, 'How To Change Your Hard Disk'), or fire up your partition manager.



The Disk Management console allows you to break your computer by just pointing and clicking. Be careful.

04 Adding the extra partition

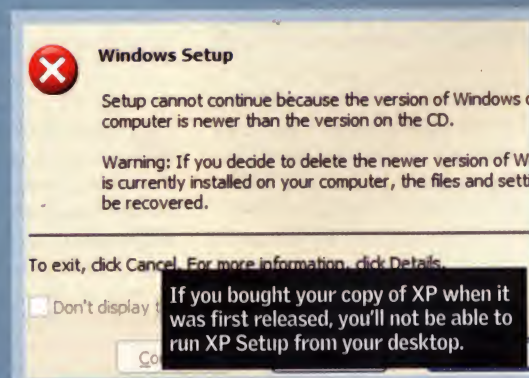
If you've installed a new drive, skip this step of the process. If you've decided on a partition manager, open it now and decide how much room you need for all your clobber. Generally speaking, you'll need a bare minimum of 30GB: 20GB given over to games and applications, 5GB for the operating system and another 5GB left over as free space on your existing partition. In Acronis Disk Director Suite, you can either open the Create Partition wizard or, if you're a bit tight for space, right-click on your drive and choose Split. When prompted, choose Primary rather than Logical for the partition type and NTFS for the file system.



Disk Director Suite allows you to split your C: drive in two.

05 Install Windows

Make a copy of your two Windows XP boot files – ntldr and NTDETECT.COM, both of which live in the root of your C: drive – by highlighting them in an Explorer window and pressing CTRL+C followed by CTRL+V. Now put your Windows setup CD in your CD-ROM tray, restart your computer and install the operating system to your recently created drive letter. Do not install it on an existing partition unless you want to wipe all your settings and break everything. Once setup has completed, you'll have a natty operating system menu appear next time you start your PC. If one of the partitions won't boot, open the one that will and restore your boot files from the backups you made earlier.



If you bought your copy of XP when it was first released, you'll not be able to run XP Setup from your desktop.

QUESTIONS QUESTIONS

Got something you want to ask? Just want something else to read? Either way, this little box will make you happy...

- ☒ Does partitioning my hard drive affect my files?
☒ No. Your files will be left untouched. That's the whole point, dummy.
- ☒ And if I've just built my PC?
☒ If your hard drive is already blank, you can use Windows Setup to create the partitions on it. A partition manager is only needed when you have an existing operating system and existing files you wish to preserve.
- ☒ I made my partition too small. Can I change it?
☒ Yes. Another function of a partition manager is to resize partitions.
- ☒ What's the ideal planting environment for an Azalea?
☒ Azaleas will do well in most locations if they're protected from midday sun, grown in well-draining areas and are regularly irrigated.
- ☒ Are you sure I can't install Windows 98?
☒ Go ahead. See if I care.



DEAR WANDY

If it ain't broke, don't fix it. If it ain't working, don't panic...



Problems?

We've all got them you know... Up to your neck in debt? Partner sleeping around? A propensity to wake up on Saturday morning with a kebab and beer can stuck to your face? We can't help with any of those (but if you know the answers, let us know), but we can solve all of your hardware hassles. Wandy knows everything and is willing to help if you email him at wandy@dearwandy.com, including as much information as necessary and system specs where applicable.

STINKY BOOTS

Q HELP!!! I've done something dreadful to my old and trusty Windows XP system and now it won't start up. It gets past the BIOS screen but then stops when loading Windows and complains about one or more missing files. The problem started when I repartitioned my hard disk into a C: and a D: drive and then installed Windows 2000. Now all I can do is load Windows 2000 – is my XP stuff gone for good? Can I just replace the files it can't find? Are the files still there, and is there a way for me to tell Windows how to 'see' them again? Nice though Windows 2000 is, I feel very lost without my XP.

Geoff Dyer

A DON'T PANIC!!! All you've done is inadvertently overwritten the Windows XP boot loader with the 2000 version. When you turn your PC on at the switch, its BIOS jumps into life and conducts a Power On Self Test (POST) to make sure that your machine is in a fit state for work – if there are errors, you'll get no further. Assuming everything checks out OK, the BIOS will then look along its list of boot devices until it finds a bootable operating system.

In the case of XP and 2000, there are two files called `ntldr` and `NTDETECT.COM` which do the job of recognising and booting Windows – you'll find them in the root directory of your hard disk (although, depending on how you've set up your PC, you may not be able to see them because they're both hidden system files). The trouble is, the version which ships with 2000 won't boot XP, whereas the one which ships with XP will boot both. The answer is to copy both files from a working XP install to a floppy disk, pen-drive or CD-ROM, then fire up Windows 2000 and overwrite the ones on your hard disk.

However, if you don't have access to a working copy of XP, the process is a trifle painful. You'll need to insert your original Windows CD, run the XP Setup program and then choose to start the Recovery Console. Now, run the following two console commands: `COPY Z:\I386\NTLDR C:\` and `COPY Z:\I386\NTDETECT.COM C:\`, where Z: is the name of your CD drive. This will copy the two boot files from your XP



We asked BT for a Voyager 2000, and this is what they sent us. Still, it's a lot nicer than being put through to one of their Indian call centres.

installation disc to your hard drive. Once you're done, reboot and enjoy both operating systems.

WONKY WIRELESS

Q I've been having problems with my wireless BT Voyager 2000. It's been working fine for almost three years with three PCs, but recently the ADSL has been cutting out randomly. I called BT and the lines check out fine – an engineer even came round and gave us two microfilters and a new socket, all tested and working perfectly. However, the problem continues. I'm thinking that a new router should sort things out, but I'm lost as to which one to choose. Would it be possible for some advice on the subject? Am I going to need new receivers, or will my existing BT Voyager 1010 USB adaptors be able to connect? Any help would be appreciated.

Glenn Mellor

A Before reaching for your credit card, you need to know everything about the problem you're trying to solve. You say that the broadband connection has been cutting out, but are you sure it's the line that's at fault rather than something else? Have you confirmed this with the front panel of the Voyager? Because if the ADSL drops, the corresponding LED will wink out. If the LED stays on, the problem is likely to be something else.

If we assume that your assessment is correct, the first thing I'd do is unplug every phone or fax from every socket in the house – yes, I know an engineer has said it's OK, but it's always best to be certain yourself. Now test again, and test using a wired Ethernet connection. If the line light still goes out at random moments, go buy yourself another Voyager 2000 – why junk what you know when it's been reliable for three years straight? It's also a good product; I'd not recommend you use anything else.

If on the other hand it turns out that the DSL is solid and it's the wireless that's failing, you'll quite likely see an error flagged on your XP desktop. Does the problem occur simultaneously on all connected machines? Does it happen to just one? If the former, try moving the Voyager to a new location away from strong sources of interference such as microwaves or even your neighbour's phone. Swap the 1010s around to make sure it's not one of them that's failing.

I LIKE CRISPS

Q I'm considering doing a complete overhaul on my Athlon 64 3000+ and X800 XT system, and was looking to spend a small fortune on an X2 4200+ and X1900 XT, but I've started wondering if it's worth waiting a few months for the new AMD socket and DirectX 10 cards? I know Halo 2 is going to need DX10 and Windows

DRIVER WATCH

Keep your PC happy

GRAPHICS

MANUFACTURER	DESC	RELEASED
ATI	CATALYST 6.4	APRIL 06
NVIDIA	FORCEWARE-84.21	17 MARCH

SOUND

MANUFACTURER	DESC	RELEASED
Creative	SOUND BLASTER X-FI 2.070004	15 NOV 05
Creative	AUDIGY, AUDIGY 4 2.080004	24 JAN 06

@ wandy@dearwandy.com

✉ dearwandy, pc zone, future publishing, 2 balcombe st, london, nw1 6nw

The overhaul you want will cost you £600 – and this time next year you'll have to do it all over again

Wandy reckons Glenn Mellor should save his money – for now



While the X1900 XT is a sexy beast, it'll be out of date this time next year.

Vista, but what about the majority of other games coming in the near future?

Ben Crisp

A As you probably know, DirectX 10 is specific to Windows Vista, and Vista won't be here for at least another six months. So you need to make a choice: upgrade to what's available now or wait until 2007. In your shoes, I'd wait. The complete overhaul you're looking to do will cost you a minimum of £600, and this time next year you'll be looking to do it all again. Quite honestly, the setup you have now is very respectable: I'd add more RAM, overclock your Athlon and Radeon and leave your money in your bank.

ACE OF DLLS

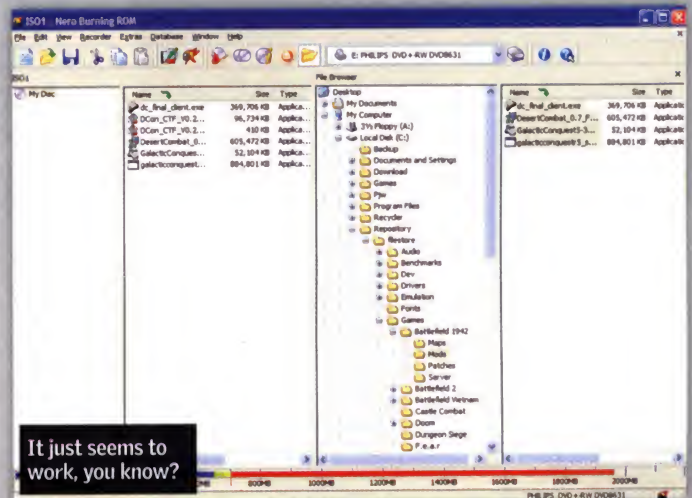
Q I have a very annoying problem on my PC. At random, the following message pops up: 'FWCD8THK.EXE Unable to locate component, this application has failed to start because ace.dll was not

found. Re-installing the application may fix this problem.' I've tried in vain to resolve this, but with no success. Any advice you can give me would be greatly appreciated.

Paul Anderson

A Ace.dll is most usually associated with malware infections. I can only assume you don't have anti-spyware (such as Microsoft Windows Defender or Lavasoft Ad-Aware) nor anti-virus (such as Eset NOD32 or Grisoft AVG Free). And if that's the case, you probably have a whole bunch of other nasty stuff grinding away in the background – only in less obvious ways. Alas, getting rid of harmful software is beyond the scope of this page. Quite often, an infection can be complex and far-reaching, and you're better off looking for details on a trustworthy site such as securityresponse.symantec.com – search for 'Spyware.Apropos' and follow the removal instructions. Then buy NOD32 and install Windows Defender. Please. **PCZ**

50 UTILITIES YOU HAVE TO USE BEFORE YOU DIE



It just seems to work, you know?

12 NERO 7

COSTS from \$59.99 (about £32) ahead.de

Until recently, there was always something deeply amateurish about Nero. Much of the interface in early versions looked as though it was lifted straight from a Windows 98 application, with old-school grey buttons and an old-fashioned directory tree compounding the problem. It was also rather geeky in the way it went about its business, making no effort to hide the complexity of what you were doing. Later versions added Express modes, where much of the process became wizard-driven. And although most users became used to the way it eschewed the ease-of-use of rivals such as Easy CD Creator in favour of a million checkboxes and drop-down menus, it worked. The stable and familiar core, Burning ROM, remained the same.

Nero creates CDs and CD labels.

It creates DVDs, too, including menus and even 5.1 Dolby Digital soundtracks. It will back up your entire system to a series of discs or even to an FTP site. The latest version includes support for a wide range of television tuner cards – these days, what doesn't? – meaning you can schedule and record analogue and digital TV programmes direct to disk. In fact, if there's something you want to do with CD-RQMs or DVD-ROMs, there's a high chance Nero will help you do it.

The only problem is the way Nero has grown. The latest version contains a mass of separate programs for a variety of applications – most of which you don't need – and trying to get your head round all of them is impossible. Buy it now before it tries to get too clever.

FORUMS:
DIRECT FROM
DEARWANDY.COM

Q: I have a small wireless network which consists of a Linksys router connected to an NTL modem. All is well, but my dad's brand-new laptop with wireless connects but says, 'Limited or no connectivity'. Can anyone help? **A:** Are you using WEP encryption? If so, try disabling the WEP briefly and then seeing if your old man's laptop will connect. In the event that it does, it's almost certainly a mismatch of WEP keys: instead of typing out the 13-digit phrase, type the 26-digit hex by copying it from the router's configuration page instead.

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Here to help!

Companies pissing you off? Don't feel your voice is strong enough to shout down the suits? Email Suzy at watchdog@pczone.co.uk with the subject heading 'Watchdog', or write to her at the address above. Pleased remember to include your name, address and contact number, and all purchasing details such as reference and invoice numbers.

WATCHDOG

Not all companies are bad – but if they are, write to us for help...

CARD GAMES

About a year ago, reader Pete Walker shelled out on a spanking new Asus V9999 graphics card in order to impart the maximum sheen and sparkle to Gordon's crowbar. In Pete's own words: "It worked a treat and all was fab and joyous for the longest time". But around February, the car started to do some odd things and Pete contacted Asus to get it sorted under the warranty. After being subjected to the usual torrent of questions about whether he'd downloaded the latest drivers and tried the card in another machine, he was sent an RMA form, which he duly filled in and returned with the card.

Not long afterwards, Pete received an email stating that the card had been received and that it would be sent on for repairs. However, two months later and with Pete still not having got his card back,



The Asus V9999: a fantastic card, when it works.

When we heard that Steve's problems were mouse-based, we nearly picked up the phone and called Rentokil...



Saitek: common problem with faulty mouse.

he's starting to worry about being stuck with the gaming equivalent of leprosy – playing games at 640x480.

Not wanting the graphical lurgy to be catching, we thought we'd best contact Asus to see what they could do. They replied: "We were sorry to hear about the problems Mr Walker experienced with his graphics card; a replacement graphics card will be sent out immediately and we will follow it up with Mr Walker. We are committed to providing our customers with the best possible support and we thank Mr Walker for informing us of the problem and apologise again for any inconvenience this has caused." Soon afterwards, Pete also emailed us: "After many moons of waiting and procrastinating by myself and Asus respectively, I now have my system back up to full speed with the correct model of the 6800GT I sent off for repair three months ago."

RODENT PROBLEMS

With one of the ZONE staff already suffering from unwanted pests in their house, when Steve Williams' email opened with 'mouse-based problems for me', we

nearly picked up the phone and called Rentokil. But it soon became apparent that Steve's problems had less fur and more buttons than we'd originally suspected.

As a gift for his birthday, he'd been bought a Saitek six-button gaming mouse for his PC, but after 20 minutes of playing, the Windows XP chime sounded and the mouse stopped working. Control returned to normal a second later, but by then, Steve found himself face down on the floor having been shot at close range in the face during his moment of incapacitation.

Putting it down to a one-off, he continued playing but soon discovered that it was anything but; every time the mouse saw a lot of action, it stopped working for a second, making multiplayer feel more like torture than fun. Steve eventually returned the mouse, but was dismayed when the replacement suffered from exactly the same problem and wondered what to do next.

After a bit of investigation, we found yet more people suffering from the same problem. A bit worried that the issue could be so widespread, we found out what Saitek had to say about the matter. "We are very sorry to hear that Mr Williams experienced recurring problems with our USB Gaming Mouse. During manufacture, a limited batch of defective IC chips was installed in one specific production lot of these mice. As the fault was intermittent, it proved extremely difficult to identify during our manufacturing testing process. We're also sorry that although Mr Williams received a replacement mouse from us, it was again from the faulty batch."

*After finally identifying all the faulty mice, Saitek have now offered Steve a working replacement but also stated: "If anybody else is having similar problems, please contact us to arrange for a replacement." So if you're experiencing problems, call Saitek on 01454 451900. **PCZ***



SAINTS NOT SINNERS

UNFORTUNATELY, SOME COMPANIES, such as Overclockers.co.uk, have graced these pages more than once. However, we were happily surprised when reader Hugh Johnson sent us a letter praising them. After eight glorious months of graphical beauty thanks to his GeForce 6800 Ultra, it decided to give up the ghost on a Monday morning.

Obviously not very impressed, Hugh phoned up Overclockers support, obtained an RMA

number and sent the card back on Tuesday. The card was then tested straight away on Tuesday afternoon, found to be faulty and a GeForce 7900GT was dispatched in its place straight away to arrive by Wednesday morning. With a two-day turn-around, Hugh's rightfully chuffed at the speedy service and also adds that his "PC doesn't sound like a Harrier taking off anymore, as the new card is so quiet". Credit where credit's due – well done Overclockers.

THE ACCUSED

ASUS

Saitek

Guilty until proven innocent

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REMEMBER:
YOU ALSO NEED
MONEY FOR FOOD
AND CLOTHING

We are legally required to remind readers that money splashed on hardware may be better spent on families, wives and girlfriends. PC ZONE isn't liable for any estrangement that may ensue.

HARDWARE DIVIDE

Shop, in the name of gaming, before you break your PC. Think it oh-oh-ver...

LOADED?

GRAPHICS

X1900 XT

EXPECT TO PAY £371

MANUFACTURER CONNECT3D

WEBSITE www.connect3d.com

Like its GeForce 7800 GTX predecessor, our current video card champ is a reference card. It's also the fastest single device available, putting most dual-card configurations in the shade. We've chosen the Connect3D variant as it's a no-nonsense package for sensible money, making it an ideal grounding for CrossFire rigs.



PROCESSOR

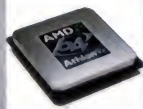
ATHLON 64 FX-60

EXPECT TO PAY £740

MANUFACTURER AMD

WEBSITE amd.com

Running at 2.6GHz, the Athlon 64 FX-60 actually clocks slightly slower than its predecessor, the FX-57, but runs dual-cores each with a 128KB L1 cache. In essence, it's seriously bloody fast. If you're looking to build an overclocked colossus which smokes 99% of other systems out there, look no further.



MOTHERBOARD

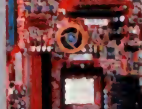
FATALITY AN8 SLI

EXPECT TO PAY £125

MANUFACTURER ABIT

WEBSITE www.abit.com.tw

Designed specifically for gaming, the nForce4 SLI-based Fatal1ty AN8 supports all 939-pin AMD processors. As well as SLI support it features ABIT's Guru Panel, a front-mounted display unit for overclockers. The board also uses a bevy of ABIT features, including QTES cooling and AudioMAX 7.1 onboard audio.



HDD

RAPTOR 150GB

EXPECT TO PAY £190

MANUFACTURER Western Digital

WEBSITE www.wdc.com

Travelling at 10,000rpm and with a 4.5ms seek time, the Raptor is billed as the world's fastest SATA drive. It's also now double the size, meaning you now need just one of them in your rig. But two in RAID-0 configuration will give you oodles of space and make *Battlefield 2* really fly.



SCREEN

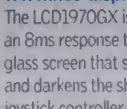
MULTISYNC LCD1970GX

EXPECT TO PAY £311

MANUFACTURER NEC Mitsubishi

The LCD1970GX is a 19in LCD screen, with an 8ms response time and an inky black glass screen that saturates all the colours and darkens the shadows. It includes a joystick controller for the on-screen display, and a four-port USB hub.

WEBSITE www.nec-display-solutions.co.uk



SOUND CARD

SOUND BLASTER X-FI FATALITY FPS

EXPECT TO PAY £129

MANUFACTURER Creative Labs

WEBSITE uk.europe.creative.com

Slightly bonkers soundcard for audiophiles with deep pockets. Supports EAX 5.0, with 64MB X-RAM for top quality sound effects. CMSS-3D works magic on a stereo signal and makes headphone gaming crystal. Sounds nicer than an Audigy, but still painfully pricey.



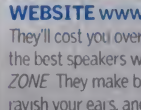
SPEAKERS

Z-5500

EXPECT TO PAY £188

MANUFACTURER Logitech

They'll cost you over £200, but they're also the best speakers we've ever tested at PC ZONE. They make both games and movies ravish your ears, and you'll soon find yourself blowing the dust from your old CDs and DVDs just so you can sit in the middle of the sound and revel in it.



SKINT?

GRAPHICS

X800 GTO

EXPECT TO PAY £110

MANUFACTURER GECUBE

WEBSITE gecube.com.tw

You could save yourself a tenner and go for the 8-pipeline GT, but you'd be missing out. The GTO is without doubt the mainstream card to go for: an overclocking dream, it can trump the 6800 GT on maximum detail and this GECUBE comes with a heat-pipe and sensible bundle.



PROCESSOR

ATHLON 64 3000+

EXPECT TO PAY £88

MANUFACTURER AMD

If you don't mind getting your hands dirty in the BIOS, Athlon 64s can be highly rewarding – particularly so on an nForce4 motherboard. Famous for overclocking and top performance in games, there's really no alternative. This AMD chip is the one to have if you're building to a budget.



MOTHERBOARD

A8N-E NFORCE4 ULTRA

EXPECT TO PAY £55

MANUFACTURER ASUSTek

WEBSITE uk.asus.com

The A8N-E supports the full range of Athlon 64 FX, dual-core Athlon 64 X2 and Athlon 64 chips, plus PCI Express and 7.1 channel audio. The nForce4 Ultra chipset has more features than a circus has clowns, and ASUS includes a raft of its own, as well as some serious overclocking tools.



HDD

1200JS SATA

EXPECT TO PAY £48

MANUFACTURER Western Digital

It's not like a 120GB hard drive is unfeasibly huge any more, but it's more than enough for the casual gamer to do a spot of casual gaming. A few good titles, a couple of hundred music files and the odd porn flick will still leave plenty of room for Windows to manoeuvre.



SCREEN

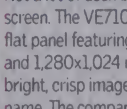
VE710S

EXPECT TO PAY £159

MANUFACTURER ViewSonic

Not a lot of dosh buys you an awful lot of screen. The VE710s is a budget-priced 17in flat panel featuring an 8ms response time and 1,280x1,024 resolution and producing bright, crisp images worthy of the ViewSonic name. The company's UltraBrite technology gives rich and vivid colours in games.

WEBSITE www.viewsonic.co.uk



SOUND CARD

SOUND BLASTER AUDIGY 2 VALUE

EXPECT TO PAY £32

MANUFACTURER Creative Labs

WEBSITE uk.europe.creative.com

If you're a casual gamer, there's little point throwing half a mortgage payment at your soundcard because you'll not be able to tell the difference. The cheap Audigy features EAX 4.0 and Dolby Digital EX support, and makes an awful lot of sense.



SPEAKERS

INSPIRE P5800

EXPECT TO PAY £39

MANUFACTURER Creative

You can go cheaper, but to meet the quality of the P5800 you'll need spend a lot more, as there's no better set in this price range. The subwoofer is deep and creamy, the satellites crisp and clean. A wired remote, line-in and headphone jack complete a very decent little package.



**Mrs Mitchell cut the school run
in half with her Callisto GXR SE**



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EU.AUTORASSAULT.COM

THE END OF THE ROAD AS YOU KNOW IT



NCsoft



NETDEVIL



The way it's
meant to be played

COMING 13 APRIL 2006



www.pegi.info

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wall chart!
See page
024

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- ➔ Mashed
- ➔ Worms 3D





PCZONE

FREEPLAY



Skint? Play PC games for feck all...

WHAT'S FREE THIS MONTH

**FREE
GAMES!**

Jammy git

A REALLY TINY jar of strawberry jam is sitting on my desk. It came with the free croissant Will left on my desk, which he was given free by a man at London Bridge who was just handing them out – they were promoting a well-known butter manufacturer. The man was a sexy lady too, a sexy lady who gave Will two boxes because of his naturally pleading face. So while there may be no such thing as a free lunch, there's definitely a free breakfast.

Satiated by free food then, I present to you this month's Freeplay section. Particular attention should be paid to the massive *Prey* demo, which is one of the longest and best demos I've seen in a long time. When you're done there, I suggest a dip into some Freeware games like *Tumiki Fighters* or *Cave Story*, or perhaps getting knee-deep in some *Oblivion* mods. Or maybe you could just go looking for free food samples at train stations.

Steve Hogarty

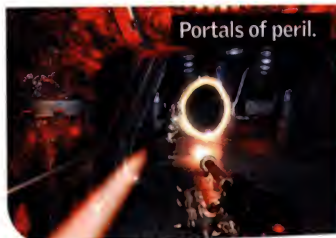
Steve Hogarty, staff writer

Try this!

You doydty rat...



In the Curtains Up mission in *Hitman: Blood Money*, there's a locked keycard door on the top floor. Sit around for a bit and eventually someone will come by and unlock it. Go inside and peek through the fence to see a bunch of rats boxing and playing cards. Insane!



Portals of peril.

112 Demo Pages

Get your free games here!



Castles of calamity.

114 Buzz

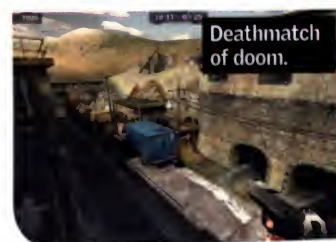
News and culture from a world of free PC gaming



Battles of brickwork.

118 Freeware

The crop-cream of free Internet gaming delivered straight to your doorstep



Deathmatch of doom.

120 Play!

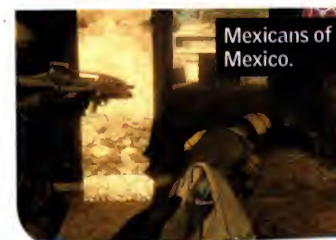
Essential reviews of the latest mods, maps and add-ons



Terrorists of tupperware.

124 Fight Club

Take us out, online! Now with more trounce to the ounce!



Mexicans of Mexico.

128 Wage war in Advanced Warfighter

Point and shoot your way through Mexico City



PCZONE
FREE-O-METER



0
HOURS

*Approximate amount of completely free stuff this month



214.2
HOURS*

Demos

On the DVD – free games galore!

PCZONE

ON THE DVD

Having problems getting something on our DVD to work? Phone our helpline on **01225 442244** and ask for cover-disc support. Alternatively, email support@futurenet.co.uk, including as much information as possible about your system and the nature of your problem.

WORLD
EXCLUSIVE!

PREY



Play the massive demo of the stunning sci-fi shooter right now! www.prey.com

WHAT A FANTASTIC treat we have for you this month if you're a fan of American Indians, alien blasting and doors that look like bottoms. 3D Realms and Human Head have delivered big-time with the demo for *Prey*, which features a huge slice of single-player action, as well as multiplayer with two modes, two maps and all the weapons!

Single-player gives you a real taster of the full adventure, taking you from the abduction of hero Tommy in his drinking hole, through to his first experiences aboard the alien spacecraft and into the spirit realm. You'll eventually get your hands on four weapons – the wrench, the rifle (complete with sniper attachment), crawler (an organic grenade) and leech gun that can literally

leech off portals on the walls for freeze power and more.

The single-player *Prey* will also teach you the ways of Wall Walking, Spirit Walking, using the lighter, switching gravity, zipping through portals and interacting with the other-worldly (and rather disgusting) environments.

Multiplayer gives you the option of playing either deathmatch or team deathmatch in two disorientating, gravity-defying maps. Salvage Walk is run through with Wall Walks for insane 360-degree blasting, while Keeper Gravity allows you to battle around the alien ship, running around the surfaces at will.

One thing's for certain, the *Prey* demo is the best thing we've had on our DVD this year, so make sure you fire it up without delay...



TOMMY'S BAR

The single-player demo begins with Tommy in his favourite watering-hole. Check out the jukebox, complete with rock greats, er, Ted Nugent and Heart, plus the selection of games – there's a reference to Human Head's *Rune*.

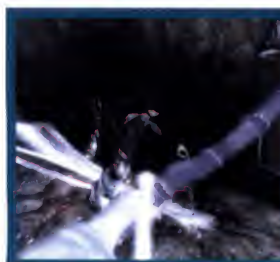


SNIPER SCOPE

Once you've twatted the first alien you encounter with your trusty wrench, pick up the rifle. Pressing the right mouse button activates the organic sniper mode, and you can zoom in and out using the mouse wheel.



POW WOW! Don't miss these *Prey* demo highlights...



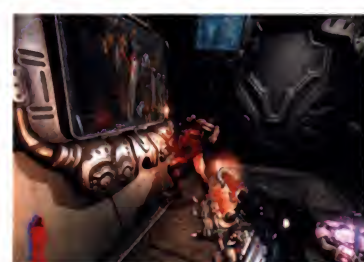
SPIRIT WALK

Further into the demo, your grandfather will instruct you in the ways of the Spirit Walk. Pressing E allows you to leave your earthly body, drift effortlessly through force fields and shoot enemies with your Spirit Bow.



PORTALS

These glowing rips in space are useful for zipping about, but they're also used by the alien scum to get the jump on you in levels. You have to be careful – if you're too trigger happy, you may end up shooting yourself.



SENSIBLE SOCCER



For when 'Mentalist Soccer' just doesn't work

www.codemasters.co.uk/sensibleoccer/

BY THE TIME you read this, England will probably have been knocked out of the World Cup, and we'll be sobbing into our pints in a St George-clad boozier somewhere. But maybe, just maybe, we'll be celebrating an historic tour to victory for our boys, by dancing on top of a bustop clutching our plastic pint like some kind of lager-y trophy.

Only you – our futuristic reader – knows whether we're sobbing or singing, but either way you're going to need a footy game to play afterwards, and here's a demo of one that's quite good.



It's a game of two sides

And one's full of South-American cheaters



CRY FOR ME, ARGENTINA

It's true that the Argentinian football team are trained to trick and bamboozle. Just the other day they sold us *Team Fortress 2* in the pub. We put the disc in our PC, only to discover it was *Hello Kitty Jump Rope*. Damn you, Argentina!



ENG-GER-LAND!

Our great isle has spawned many heroes, but none can live up to the majesty of our boys in Germany, who it is said light the very stars in the sky with their footballing excellence. Go on lads; the Falklands were ours anyway.

AUTO ASSAULT

Destruction for layabouts



www.autoassault.com

ON OUR LIST of gaming goodness, elves and goblins have a big, constipated face drawn next to them they're so rubbish.

If you also hate poncy elves, then you'll like this *Auto Assault* demo, which thanks

to us will let you drive around and shoot barrels online for up to 14 days. Just visit eu.autoassault.com/pczone/, get a key, activate it on your NCsoft account and play until your hands go numb.

OH GOD, YES! I can drive and shoot things



1 You may notice that we have a massive gun sticking out our car roof. This is the kind of body kit that'd make a right killing in the Asda car park.

2 I've been chasing and shooting this guy in my car. He's my training instructor and I shouldn't be shooting him, but he's slagged off my new rims.

3 Ah, flaming barrels. All we need now in this post-apocalyptic sci-fi universe would be some tramps pushing shopping trolleys. So where are they?

FREAK FACTORY

Look at the weirdos you can make in this game



LOOK AT MY BEARD

This is our biomek. We've given him grey hair with a matching grey beard. We wish we could be a silver fox with a twin-cannoned jeep some day.



HELLO MISSUS

Check the shoulder pads and the mouthpiece. Maybe she works in a post-apocalyptic McDonald's drivethrough, we just don't know.

THE BEST OF THE REST



DUNGEONS & DRAGONS ONLINE: STORMREACH

We spoil you, we really do. Not only do we have the *Prey* demo, the *Sensible Soccer* demo and the *Auto Assault* client on the veritable platter that is the DVD, we've also got the *Dungeons & Dragons Online* client, which is some sort of side dish of roast potatoes. Not only does this enable you to look at the MMO's snazzy log-in screen, it will also let you play for seven days straight simply by going to the Web address listed below. After these seven days, a great thunderclap shall erupt from the heavens and you shall be thrown back into a regular life again, to live and love in peace. www.ddo-europe.com/request-key.php



E3 MOVIES

Over E3, Suzy painstakingly downloaded every decent movie and reduced our corporate mega-bandwidth internet connection to something more akin to a 33.3kbps modem. We're thankful though, because now they're all emblazoned on the discs forever. Go watch them all twice, or else she'll explode with frustration and look a bit like Phoenix from the new *X-Men* movie. www.e3expo.com



RUSH FOR BERLIN

In *Rush for Berlin*, you don't actually rush towards Berlin in some sort of race. No, you have to fight a whole lot of Nazis instead. Is this more exciting than rushing towards Berlin? Probably. So count yourself lucky and get playing this demo. www.rushforberlin.com



HITMAN: BLOOD MONEY

www.fileshack.com/file.x?fid=8863



The python picked the passion fruit, the marmoset the mandarin, the parrot painted packets that the whole caboodle landed in. Um Bongo, an example of a great plan coming together. For more, play a level of *Blood Money* and start scheming.

RUSH FOR BERLIN MULTIPLAYER

www.fileshack.com/file.x?fid=8872



Tired of fighting mindless AI Nazi drones in our demo? Wish there was an answer, a respite to the WWII repetition? Well, why not try taking on your mates instead in the multiplayer portion of the WWII RTS? We think you'll quite like it.

SNIPPETS



IT'S GOOD TO TALK

www.ventrilo.com
It's good to talk, as that guy off the BT advert whose name escapes us once said. So if you want to avoid a Leeroy-style accident in *World Of Warcraft*, you need to download yourself the latest version of Ventrilo. A VoIP client that allows you to chat with fellow gamers, it's rapidly gaining popularity in Blizzard's MMO – so download a copy and get talkin' good now!



OLDBLIVION

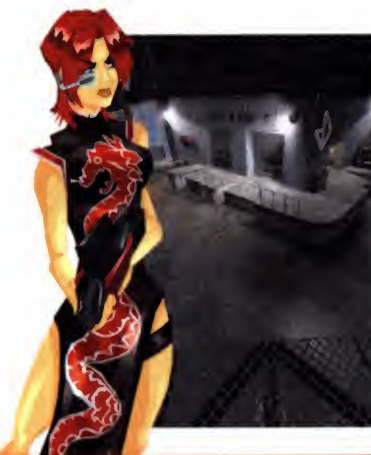
www.oldblivion.com
No-one should be denied the chance to lose themselves in *Oblivion*, especially those poor unfortunates who can't afford to upgrade. So this mini-mod enables *Oblivion* to run on graphics cards that don't support DirectX 9.0. Yes, all you GeForce 3 and 4 owners can now lose your life to the vast expanses of Cyrodiil too. Do yourself a favour though, and read Wendy's Buyer's Guide first.

WHEN GENRES COLLIDE

Hybrid *Half-Life 2* mod has us in an iron grip www.irongrip.net | Mod for: *Half-Life 2*

WHY JUST DABBLE in one genre when you can have two? *Iron Grip* lets you do just that – the Rahmos forces are controlled by a single RTS-based general, and their structures produce vehicles and forces which spread through city environments to try to crush Resistance forces. Meanwhile, the FPS army of the Resistance have to use their surroundings, lay low and use

skirmishing tactics to take out power nodes and the Rahmos HQ. It's a novel concept and the team's been hard at work on their Soviet-style characters, oppressive environments and urban guerrilla warfare, and have even found time for an impressive graphical overhaul since their last Freeplay appearance. There's no news on release dates yet, but we eagerly await the battle of the genres.



Moody.

AFRAID OF THE DARK?

GoldenEye will be when it sees *Perfect Dark: Source* www.pdark-mod.com | Mod for: *Half-Life 2*

CUT BACK TO the carefree days of the late '90s. Chances are you were playing *Half-Life* or *Unreal Tournament*, and missed out on the Nintendo 64 classic *Perfect Dark*. Shame on you. But all is forgiven if you give this *Half-Life 2* total conversion a look-in, which splashes some Source-y paint on the old dear and brings her supple level design and slideshow frame-rate bang up-to-date.

According to the mod's questionably translated website, *Perfect Dark: Source*

is fast approaching its first beta release, in which you'll find all manner of nostalgic goodies including 13 classic weapons and three multiplayer maps straight from the original N64 game. So you'll finally be able to man the Farsight and shoot through walls on your PC – who said those halcyon days were gone forever?



Youth club murals are always rubbish.



Joanna: doing gingers proud since 2000.

AHOY THERE!

***Pirates, Vikings & Knights II* unveils a princely trio...** www.pvkii.com | Mod for: *Half-Life 2*

IF THERE'S A list of ingredients for our perfect game, pirates would be high up the list. The pleasures of wearing an eye-patch and stuffed parrot while screaming out, "Yarr me hearties!" can only be surpassed by running around with braided blond plaits and a helmet with giant pointy horns shouting, "Burn and pillage!" and then jumping into a suit of armour and running around shouting, "For my gallant lady!" In fact, knowing that we can play as pirates, vikings and knights is all we need to make us want it, but the mod also boasts varied melee combat, a diverse range of modes that include Booty, Pillage and Slay The Dragon, and a host of unique weapons and abilities that include a Parrot & Hook Combo, runes and holy water. Yarr!



Ripe for a naval siege.



"My god, that wolf is devouring that man."

THE BIGGER PICTURE

ZONE talks to Robbie Cooper – a photographer taking pics of gamers in real life and their in-game characters alterego.net

PCZ: What can you tell us about your Online Identities project?

RC: "This project is intended to document the culture, while conveying something of why people play these games. So I've been to China and Korea to shoot pictures, as well as Germany, Sweden, France, Greece, Austria, the US and Hawaii. Over the next few months I'll be going to Australia, New Zealand and Japan. The book is published next year."

PCZ: Have you made any interesting discoveries about MMO players?

RC: "I've discovered that people play games for a lot of different reasons and that there's massive diversity among them. There's quite a large group who are interested for intellectual or academic reasons. There are also hackers who make their living from them, workers in China who earn a dollar a day playing them, military people who use them to train and soldiers in Iraq who are using them to

escape from their reality. I could go on – it's really a staggeringly diverse world."

PCZ: What kind of people play as the opposite sex? Are there a lot of them?

RC: "People play as the opposite sex mostly in a calculated way – to get gifts or to get better deals if they're trading. Or in Asia, the majority of guys play as the opposite sex because they would rather look at a female avatar. To make a sweeping generalisation, players in Asia tend to be more concerned about what they're looking at, rather than what other people are seeing when they look at their avatar in the game world."

PCZ: Has meeting gamers in the real-world proved any stereotypes to be false?

RC: "I think when I started, I may have had the perception that it was going to be hard to persuade people to be photographed. Which was based on a

stereotype not just of gamers but of the Internet and the kind of people who use it for entertainment. At one point I was getting 50 emails a day from people who wanted to be photographed. So that was completely wrong. Generally, people have been really hospitable and open about themselves."

PCZ: Who was the most interesting gamer you've met and why?

RC: "The most interesting gamer I met so far spent £100,000 of his own money to open a club inside the game Entropia. Jon is a bit of a character. I forgot to take pictures when I met him and have to go back to Miami to do it again."

PCZ: Can you tell us some details about your forthcoming book?

RC: "The book will be out around March and you will be able to buy it from alterego.net as well as bookstores."

Robbie Cooper has snapped gamers from all around the world.



SNIPPETS



USE THE FORCE

www.secondlifeherald.com
Star Wars mods have swamped the gaming world, and now they're set to invade the world of *Second Life* too. Intrepid *Star Wars* fans within the MMO have created a game within a game, and Force powers, lightsabers and Jedi relics all make an appearance...



ROUGH JUSTICE

tinyurl.com/omd2p
MMOs are beginning to mete out their own forms of punishment, and *RF Online* is the latest to join the ranks. After weeks of investigating RMT sites, two GMs jumped into some huge mech suits, sent the guilty parties to an inescapable prison and waited for them to dish out some mechanised justice.

Bug-Fix of the Month

THIS MONTH
STAR WARS: EMPIRE AT WAR



The v1.03 patch "corrects an issue in which the Death Star could be sold."

Movie of the Month

CRYSIS

This is the film that sat on top of E3 and played it like a set of bongos. It's always the same – just when you've got used to one generation, the next one comes and slaps its nasties right in your pupils. So say hello to *Crysis*, the game that'll force us all to love Windows Vista...

There's a fight? Great, I'm a hero – and us heroes love having fights with things!

Brilliant, a creepy silhouette of a boss – boss battles are the hero's favourite, and I'm a hero.

Erm, right then. You lot stay here – I'm going to shoot something else for a while.

Shit off, you great clanky bastard. He doesn't know a hero when he sees one.

TAKING LIBERTIES

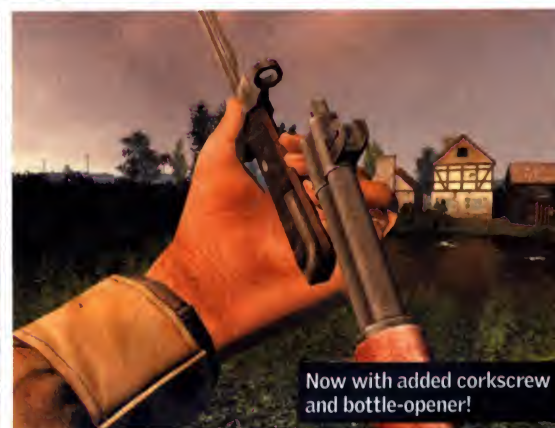
Resistance & Liberation makes *Half-Life 2* a realistic war sim

www.resistanceandliberation.com | Mod for: Half-Life 2

IRONICALLY, WHILE THE real world spends its time trying to escape realism, the virtual community spends most of its time striving towards it. Where will it stop? Explosions that rock your desk and bullets flying out of your monitor that you have to dodge? You may have thought that you'd seen it all with *Red Orchestra*, but *Resistance & Liberation* looks set to step things up a notch on the realism stakes.

It follows the soldiers of the 82nd Airborne Division as they lead their crosshair-free campaign through the occupied towns of Normandy. In the mod's crusade for obsessive realism, a lot of FPS conventions get the chop; scoreboards and death messages are the first to go and believe it or not, *R&L* has no HUD of any kind.

Rather than championing simulation over fun gameplay, this raises some potentially interesting scenarios: not knowing whether you've killed or simply wounded an opponent, for example, could lead to some sneaky death-feigning manoeuvres; and not knowing which side is winning the battle could put a stop to sniper-camping fragfests. Keep an eye on this when battle begins...



WIN A HALF-LIFE 2 HEADCRAB!

Ten collectible cuddly headcrabs to be won!

WELL, WE MENTIONED in last month's mag that Valve should start producing official *Half-Life 2* toy merchandise. And guess what? In what we see as a victory for *PC ZONE* (and not in fact a complete coincidence), here's the first official toy from the makers of *Half-Life 2*! Part of the company's new 'Half-Life 2 Critters range' is this fantastic and hard-to-get-hold-of soft and cuddly headcrab – and we have ten of the face-sucking creatures to give away courtesy of the very nice (but disturbing) folks at Valve.

Apparently a quarter-size replica of the real thing, each headcrab has unique markings and can actually sit on your

head or attach to the face courtesy of the alien species' front mandibles. You know you want one of these fabulous items, so to stand a chance of being jumped on and turned into a lurching, bloodthirsty zombie, just answer the question below and tell us what your most-wanted PC game is...

What's the name of the pet headcrab owned by Dr Isaac Kleiner in *Half-Life 2*?

Send your entries on a postcard or the back of an envelope to Headcrab compo, *PC ZONE*, Future Publishing, 2 Balcombe Street, London NW1 6NW. Make sure you get your entries to us by Wednesday July 19, 2006. Any received after this date will be dropped over the *Big Brother* house.





How to keep pool maintenance to a minimum.



Fancy bird table or intergalactic travelling device? You decide.

WARP LIKE AN EGYPTIAN

Stargate: The Last Stand fulfils our fanboy dreams

www.stargatetls.net | Mod for: Half-Life 2

WITH EVEN NON-VIOLENT girly-shows like *Desperate Housewives* seeing a game release, it's high time we saw sci-fi dynamo *Stargate* take the space-warp to the gaming realm. Seeing as the official game fell through, the hopes of a thousand *Stargate* nerds lie with this warp-tastic *Half-Life 2* mod (the

modders game of choice), which is currently being tinkered away at by a starry-eyed team of programmers.

As you can see from the screenshots, all the funny shooty-staffs, Egyptian soldiers and indeed, watery warp-gates from the TV series have been saved for this Source-y mod. We're told to expect a

number of team-based game modes, along with character classes from the show and an exciting list of pilotable vehicles.

If the developers are to be trusted, *Stargate: The Last Stand* is about half done, so with a little luck you should be piloting pyramid-shaped rocket-ships in no time at all.



"Get 'orf my land!"

A TURNIP FOR THE BOOKS

Tractors get tactical in *Farm Cry*

www.toxicdream.co.uk | Mod for: Far Cry

BESIDES WILL'S DAD, the world of agriculture doesn't crop up (geddit?) much in *PC ZONE*. But that's about to change, as one bunch of modders are turning the luscious world of *Far Cry* into a farming game. In it, each map will have at least two farms, each with a shed full of tools, a tractor and some other pieces of farming

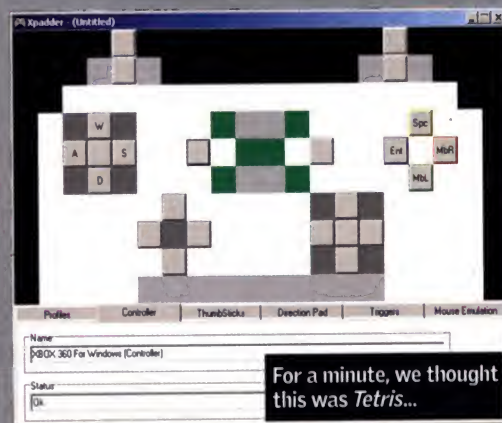
machinery – and roughly every five minutes, the crops that each team harvests will be sold. It's about as strange an idea for a mod as we've ever heard, but we find the idea of swapping your P90 for a plough strangely alluring. Just as long as Dr Krieger doesn't attempt to genetically modify the crops.

BACK TO MY PAD

Xpadder gives all-round pad support xpadder.com

WE ALL OWN GAMES in which playing constitutes lighting up the keyboard with your dextrous digits and nearly scrubbing off your fingerprints in the process. Luckily, there's a handy little program called Xpadder which uses a gamepad to simulate keypresses and mouse movements – and

with a whole range of customisation options, you can use it for any game, from ageing DOS titles to the glorious collection of games found in Freeplay. In fact, if you're bored of a mouse and keyboard or just addicted to using a 360 pad, you can even use it for darting around Windows too.



SO, YOU WANT TO BE A...

LEAD ARTIST

NAME Nathan Fisher
JOB TITLE: Lead artist

WORKING ON: LMA

Manager 2007

AGE: 32

EXPERIENCE:

Six and a half years on LMA Manager titles

PCZ How did you get started?

NF "I studied graphic communication and film at uni, then after travelling and working in Australia, I moved back to Birmingham and worked for a design agency before getting the job at Codemasters."

PCZ What's the pay like?

NF "It's very good considering I get to make games for a living! I joined Codemasters as an entry-level artist and have worked my way up to a lead artist position. Codemasters are good at rewarding and developing staff."

PCZ What does your job involve?

NF "My day-to-day job is managing and controlling all the art content and style of an LMA title; from the 2D front-end interface to the 3D match."

PCZ How rewarding is your job?

NF "It's very rewarding when you see your game in the shops, when it's gone to number one in the charts or when you read people's comments about how much they're enjoying it."

PCZ Most annoying part?

NF "To be honest, there isn't really anything. There are days when things don't go your way and it may get on your nerves, but you just have to get on with it and get it sorted."

WE SAY... DIY

Get together a good portfolio that shows off your creative skills, whether they be in 2D, 3D or animation. An understanding of game modelling and texturing techniques is an advantage, but it's most important to keep developing your skills and be passionate about your work.



Freeware



Steve Hogarty is some sort of free-game loving fiend...

Freeware is dedicated to bringing you the best free games content the Net has to offer, be it freeware, homebrews, remakes or webgames. This month we get acquainted with sticky shooters, space simulations and epic platformers. Also, a funny webgame you can't win.

TUMIKI FIGHTERS

Side-scrolling shooters are getting sticky

Developer: ABA Games | snipurl.com/tumiki

SHOOT 'EM UPS (or 'shmups') take seconds to grasp, imperceptible stretches of time to master and their basic design ethos means that, compared to other genre examples, they're relatively easy to create without a budget. That said, creating a good shmup is no cake-walk, and creating an outstanding one is quite a bit harder still. Kenta Cho is a household name (as long as you live in a house obsessed with freeware shmups), developing a whole series of amazing and free-scrolling shoot 'em ups, all of which share a certain style, but each of which have unique quirks and features.

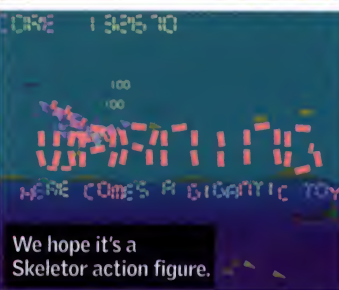
Tumiki Fighters lies somewhere on the fringe of Cho's style, with his recognisable laser blasts being the only visual clue this is one of his creations. Otherwise, your own ship and the waves of enemies and

bosses are made from distinct, colourful building blocks. Blast away at your foes until they fall or explode and you can collect their blocks, not only adding to your ship's size and defences, but also obtaining their firepower too. Potentially, your ship could end up filling the entire screen, with pieces of the boss from the last level near its centre, still firing that formation of lasers which gave you so much trouble when you were on the receiving end, and the hapless wave of enemies destroyed a moment ago on its surface. A single laser, if it reaches your original ship, ends the game.

In the bread-and-butter genre of shmups, *Tumiki Fighters* is a fresh BLT. Extremely difficult and touting a fantastic freeform approach to power-ups, this is a gem of a freeware title.

**FREEWARE
GAME
OF THE
MONTH**

Giant Freeware stickers help break up the action.



KILL YOUR TELEVISION

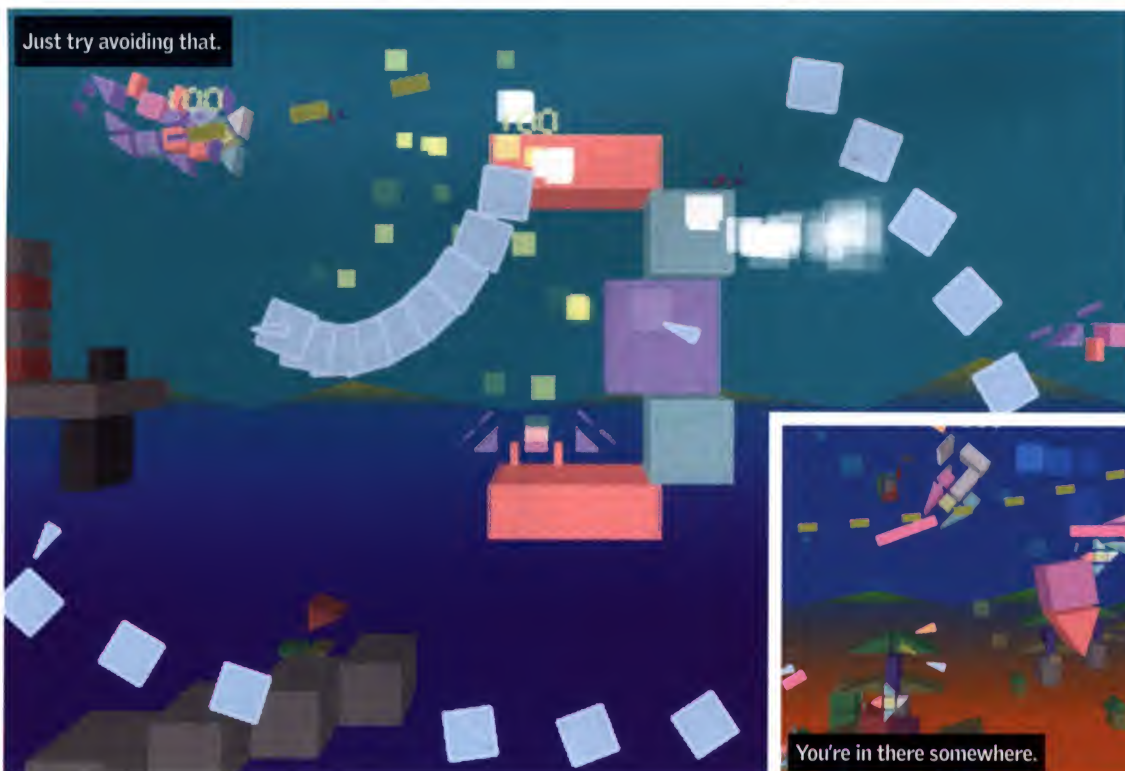
And what, buy some wind chimes?

Dev: dessgeega
killyourtelevision.dessgeega.com

FANS OF IRONICALLY high-profile and commercial bands such as System Of A Down, as well as avid readers of the readme file for *Kill Your Television* will no doubt be aware that the flickering box (or high-def plasma screen) in your living room (or living room-cum-bedroom/kitchen) is trying to 'drag you into its vacuous world of racism, sexism, commercialism and manufactured consent'.

It's time to put an end to it with this probably satirical yet enjoyable shooter. Your mind (turret) is being approached by the evils of television (repeats of *The Apprentice*), and must destroy the tellies to create big combos for points. Points-based systems and high-score tables seem a bit capitalist to us, which undermines the meaning of the game anyway. Still fun to play though.

Just try avoiding that.



ORBITER



Hubble, bubble, toil and space rubble

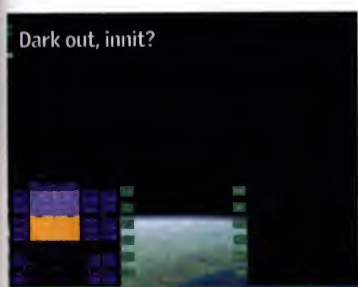
Dev: Martin Schweiger | snipurl.com/qh24

SPACE. IT'S CLEAR once you play *Orbiter* that our endeavours to reach it are half-baked. Our current means of getting up there consists of literally strapping ourselves to a massive rocket, and our means of getting home consists of trying not to explode while we fall back down. That's not to say that it isn't fun, and this freeware space sim does an astounding job of replicating exactly how I'd imagine space exploration to be – hugely complicated and visually stunning.

Holding down the plus key to fire the main thrusters, then seeing the Earth slowly drop away, the horizon begin to curve and the sky turn from day to night is simply spectacular. Actually getting the shuttle to orbit Earth is quite a bit harder, and as for docking with the International

Space Station, well it quickly becomes apparent why it takes an age for NASA to plot these missions. A single error sees you plummeting to your atmospheric doom, condemned to be the subject of politically incorrect and crap jokes for the next four months. *Orbiter* offers a few other fictional spaceships to play around with too, along with scenarios on Venus, Mars and the moon, the only other places in the solar system worth visiting.

I suggest firing the shuttle thrusters while still docked to the space station, and trying to fly back down to Florida with it still attached, complete with really confused Russians still inside. Otherwise, this is the closest you're likely to get to space without writing a cheque to Branson.



CAVE STORY

Once upon a time... Dev: Pixel | snipurl.com/pcz_cave

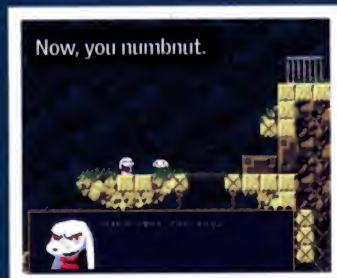
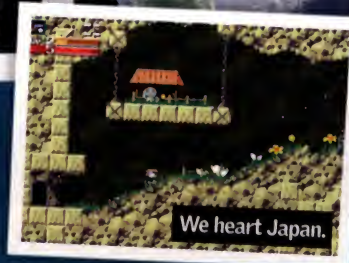
ONCE AN INCOMPREHENSIBLE Japanese platformer, *Doukutsu Monogatari* – or *Cave Story* to you – made its English debut just over a year ago. The new-found tongue does nothing to dilute the title's Japan-appeal however, and what remains is a bright and amazingly deep platformer.

Very much in the vein of classics such as *Castlevania* and *Metroid* (just try not

to think of Samus as you grab an energy tank and hear a distinct feel-good tune), *Cave Story* boasts a full six hours of gameplay and even three different endings – a rare depth with freeware titles.

As suggested by the game's English title, *Cave Story* is set in a cave and has a story. The cave is rendered in a basic retro style, with blocky sprites

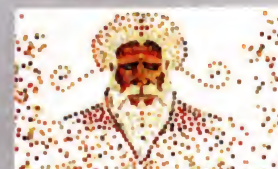
and low resolutions harking back once again to its classic platformer inspirations. The story, as you'd expect, is prominent enough to carry six hours of gameplay. This is a fantastic game, and one whose basic style should not deter you from its underlying charm and playability. Still endlessly compelling, *Cave Story* hasn't been lost in translation.



FREEPLAYFREWARE

WEBGAME OF THE MONTH

The Broth



Dev: Cherry Internet Services
www.thebroth.com/mosaic

Remember those big chunky Duplo building blocks, just like Lego except too big to choke on? Well, *The Broth* provokes memories of those halcyon playschool days where, when the teacher's anxiety medication began to kick in, you were made to play with these blocks with your peers. Most of the time you got within two blocks of completing the best Duplo dragon the world had ever witnessed, when you had to go searching for more blocks. But no sooner had you stolen the legs from little Jeremy's Duplo horse (which looked nothing like a horse anyway), somebody had snatched the dragon in your absence and raided it for building materials. This is what *The Broth* is like: a massively multiplayer mosaic creation tool where nothing can be created without intense co-operation, and any attempts to build a dragon are destroyed by bigger boys on the Internet. Sigh.

FREEPLAYPLAY!



TACTICAL OPERATIONS: CROSSFIRE

Play: MOD



Jon Blyth offers a local clergyman another slice of the *Tactical Operations* cake

www.to-crossfire.net | Mod for: Unreal Tournament 2004



IT'S QUITE AN interesting story, how we got to here. A long time ago, at the beginning of the century, a group of enthusiastic modders set out to make an army vs terrorists team multiplayer based on the Unreal engine.

The result, *TacticalOps*, was so popular – and prompted enough cries of ‘better than *Counter-Strike*!’ – that Microprose convinced them to swap boxed copies for cash in 2002. Released less than a year after 9/11, *TacticalOps: Assault On Terror* must have been one of the first game titles to capitalise on Lil'Diddy Bush's newly miffed attitude towards terrorism.

Whether or not it was as good as *Counter-Strike* – and between you and us, it wasn't – players have been dropping off

steadily, so members of the original team have been working since 2005 on a sequel. *Tactical Operations: Crossfire* is back to its free mod roots, and upgrades the action to the ragdoll-pioneering Unreal 2 engine.

The title has diplomatically stepped away from current world politics, but the idea is still the same. Some plucky terrorists versus some equally plucky army chaps in an assortment of games based around bomb-planting, hostage-taking and mutual murdering.

The maps are great too, with some solid level design as well as a wide variety of styles. Once you've whipped a couple of hostages out of a mountainside monastery, indulge yourself in a simple killgasm in a Japanese village. There's a city centre, and

the non-optional industrial dockside map; the 1.1 beta has eleven maps in all.

Considering the bots are so incredibly dumb – they jump and crouch at each other like well-armed Cocker Spaniels – it's reassuring to see a few well-populated 70 servers playing friendly games. It looks good, it plays well and the maps distract you from the *Counter-Strike* similarities.

Having made the transition from mod to retail once, the team are probably aiming to do it again. However, with free games comes instant forgiveness, and no moral grounds for complaint. It's a great mod, well-made but the engine is developing wrinkles. Something special will have to happen before it'll convince the good people of Poundland to trade in their tenners.

GROGG: TERRIFYING TALES OF THE MAN-APE

Play: **MOD**



Andy Robinson is feeling **GROGG-y**

www.grogg-thegame.com | Mod for: Half-Life 2

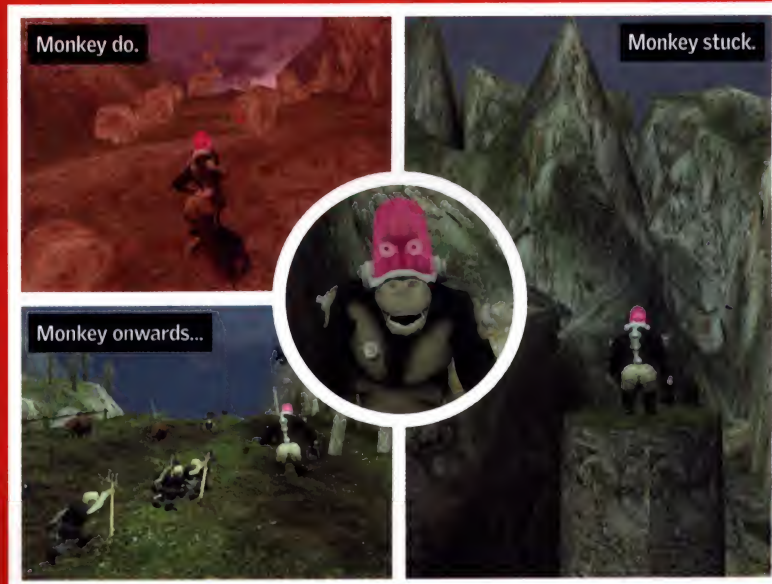
A MONKEY WITH a man's brain – whatever next? A talking car? A dog that reads the newspaper? We're no good at coming up with wacky videogame IP, but the blokes behind **GROGG** obviously are, because as you're about to find out he's one crazy monkey.

As you'll notice from our carefully captured screenshots, **GROGG** is a third-person platformer set in a wacky B-movie world. Rescuing your mad scientist father is the name of the game, but those pesky pitchforked villagers will do a whole lot of poking to make sure your hairy ape posterior doesn't get far past the first irritating jump puzzle.

While the voice-acting and soundtrack are generally fantastic, the single map

that's currently available is a bit rough around the edges. Gameplay revolves around picking up villagers before lobbing them at switches and each other – which is all fine and dandy until you realise they're completely invincible and they proceed to give you a damn good pitchforking.

Jump puzzles were never really in fashion and they're feeling the pain in *Half-Life 2*'s shoot-errific Source engine. We hope the **GROGG** team can get down to a bit of spit and polish before the next release, because this first level doesn't live up to the mod's entertaining intro movie and genuinely humorous voice-acting.



NAVY INVADERS



"This am great sea battles," claims *Jon Blyth*

forum.actofwar.info/download.php?id=274 | Mod for: Act Of War: High Treason

AOW: DIRECT ACTION was an excellent RTS game with incredibly butch cut-scenes. The expansion pack, *High Treason*, was a passable addition, hampered mainly by a lack of incredibly butch cut-scenes and poor AI for naval units. On top of that, the naval units just weren't available for single-player skirmish games. They seemed like a disappointingly incomplete addition to the war.

Eugen have been paying attention to criticism and have released *Navy Invaders*, a mod that integrates the naval units into a campaign against the computer's AI on any of the existing ten naval maps. It's still not seamless, though – they've stripped out the resource management to make the game a less bureaucratic matter of destroying your opponents' shipyards, taking out all the dockers and prostitutes that entails.

This is a worthwhile addition to *High Treason*, but it does make you wonder why they didn't include naval AI in the first place. Well, it's better now, so let's not dwell in the past. Honestly, you're so negative sometimes.



Play: **MOD**

PCZONE TOP 5 SPORTS MODS



- 1 INTERNATIONAL ONLINE SOCCER**
Play the beautiful game on a beautiful game – *Half-Life 1*.
- 2 DEATHBALL**
On a firm base of football, rugby and handball, this *UT2004* mod adds lashings of lovely violence.
- 3 DUFFER'S GOLF**
What? Golf in the *UT2004* engine? Great fun, highly addictive, Tiger Woods plays it.
- 4 CARBALL**
This *UT2004* mod lets you beat your friends at football and then destroy their car. Try it in real life.
- 5 KANONBALL**
Like that sport in *Starship Troopers*, this *HL1* mod is tres brutal. Scared, aren't you?

KINGKENNY'S STAR WARS MOD

Play: **MOD**



Jon Blyth is starry-eyed... kingskins.avp2mods.com | Mod for: Aliens Vs Predator 2

STAR WARS - THE space cow with a million teats and an infinite udder sac. So heavy is its bulging influence, that the fans have been forced to go back in time to pay tribute and mod the somewhat ageing *AvP2* to include X-wings and Jango Fetts.

Why *Aliens vs Predator 2*? Well, the marines become the Jedis, albeit blaster-toting Jedis, the predators mod slightly more neatly into bounty hunters with amazing multi-vision and, um, a head-collecting habit. And the aliens? Well, they're still aliens.

The single-player game is baffling. Efforts made to conceal the *AvP* roots are minimal, and any immersion you might have wrung from the Darth Vader splash screen is lost when you wonder what a young Jedi like yourself is doing

fighting the Weyland-Yutani corporation, while a predator from a galaxy far, far away jumps around in the trees.

To be fair, the multiplayer is more convincing, but be prepared to set up your own games and invite your friends; public games are scarce.

With a bit more work, this could become a decent mod. But when a beloved Labrador dies, you shouldn't spend two years dressing up his corpse in a Tuskan Raider outfit. Although if you do, please send us your photos.



Obviously skinned by a Jedi.

Classic: **MOD**

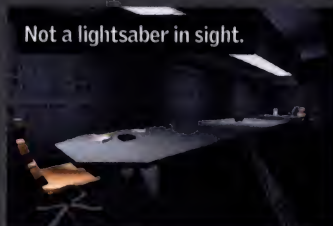
THE SPECIALISTS

Especially for you

www.specialistsmod.net
Mod for: Half-Life

MOST MOD MAKERS are content to either cram their mod with the most over-the-top moves going, or turn it into the most realistic around – but the creators of *The Specialists* wanted to do both. With their objectives being 'action-movie gameplay style but also credible realism', they managed to pull this off via a blend of well-known characters (Neo and Gordon Freeman being just two), a huge arsenal of weapons and a variety of death-defying moves that injected *Half-Life* with a well deserved dose of frantic action. Choosing between an acrobatic 'action man', running up walls and back-flipping before releasing a barrage of bullets, or a 'specialist' with heavy firepower but less agility, pretending to be an action hero had never been so good.

Not a lightsaber in sight.



Where are all the Ewoks?



Single Player

LOAD GAME
JEDI-KNIGHT
BOUNTY HUNTER
ALIEN

Something's not quite right here...



BABYLON & SUBCULTURE

Ryan Garside babbles on for Babylon snipurl.com/bbyln | snipurl.com/sbcltr | Map for: Half-Life 2



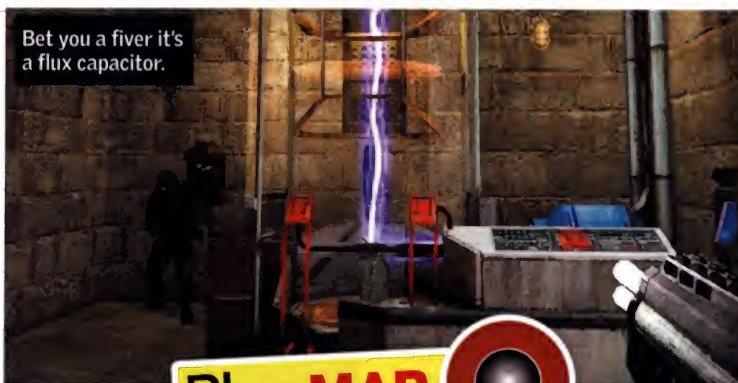
HUNGRY FOR SOME new levels?

Looking to add some spice to *Half-Life 2* deathmatch? Out of salt? Then look no further than these two tasty but probably inedible mapping morsels.

Set in a Persian temple with bouncing orbs of energy and oddly arranged mosaics of dogs, Babylon is a quirky map and not the first place that springs to mind for deathmatch – but it all works very well. Transportation portals are dotted around corridors, while the majority of the action takes place in massively open halls. Corridors are fitted with kitsch rows of flaming torches too, a touch of Persian authenticity to complement your killing experience – bliss.

In contrast, Subculture is far more stereotypically *Half-Life*, with exploding barrels and crates aplenty. The simple map features great connectivity, with height variations adding to the mayhem. If you like the idea of wading around in dirty sewer water chasing your friends in the dark – and let's face it who doesn't? – this is for you.

Bet you a fiver it's a flux capacitor.

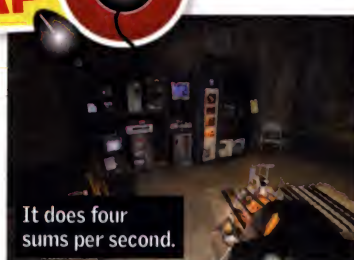


Play: **MAP**

Non-existent: ball-lightning.



It does four sums per second.



THE ELDER SCROLLS IV: OBLIVION

Is the world (of Cyrodiil) not enough? Demanding more bang for your buck? **Steve Hogarty** starts buck-banging...



Play: **MOD**



HOVIS HAS BEEN around since 1887. They know bread better than bread knows itself. If you enter a room with a slice of bread, a blind Hovis employee could list off the stats of that slice: dimensions, grain, consistency and freshness, based on the smell and sound of the bread alone. Yet, there's always room for change. Not necessarily *improvement*, but change. Loaves with invisible crusts for example, or the fantastic 'Best of Both' range, with the taste of white bread and the *goodness* of wholegrain: these are innovations which enrich our everyday, bread-loving lives.

"But why are you telling me this?!" you scream angrily, spitting breadcrumbs and clutching a dry slice of white in front of your humming PC. Well, because *Oblivion* has its fair share of changes too, such as...



Pretty.

They always go for the groin.



BTmod

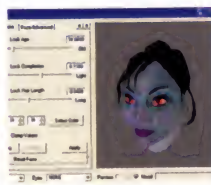
btmod.beider.org



Oblivion's interface is a bit 'chunky', and the ever-stealthy scapegoat of consoleitis was the cause. PC gamers demand more text on-screen, the option to let go of mummy's hand and remove the compass, and a useful map that goes all the way across your monitor. This, among other things, is what **BTmod** delivers. It's simple, to the point and is pompously regarded by many as a 'fix' rather than a mod. We recommend this heartily.

Oblivion Construction Set

www.elderscrolls.com



I know what you're thinking, a bit obvious yes? But unlike *Morrowind*, *Oblivion's* modding tools weren't shipped with the game, so this is a worthy download. Don't be daunted by the prospect of modding the game either: it's really easy and the first time you create a house with a book on a table containing nothing but a rude word repeated over and over, you'll be hooked. Release it if you like, it might even be popular.

Reznod's Mannequins

tinyurl.com/hfjrc



If collecting mannequins and dressing them up while singing 'pretty, preeetty' is how you wind down, why not try this? Allowing you to create static NPCs with inventories you can manipulate, this mod allows you to create life-sized Barbie dolls, and - more importantly, a cool way to store and show off armour sets. It works well with the *Your Personal Museum* mod too, which gives you somewhere to keep your army of dolls.

Cheydinhal Petshop

www.tessource.net/files/cache/2054.html



Pets. Some people are a bit mad about them, calling them Foofy or Mister Whiskers and telling stories to their friends about how their cat slept in a shoe and then in a hat. Now pet owners and indeed people curious about pet ownership can experience the delights of having mini versions of *Oblivion's* creatures follow them around. They grow and level-up with you too, unlike real pets whose killing potential declines with age.

Harvest

oblivionharvest.googlepages.com



When I extract special ingredients from mushrooms, the mushroom usually looks bugged. *Oblivion* perpetuates the myth that plants can survive any sort of pillaging and still retain their plantly exuberance. **Harvest** changes this by adding a simple script which changes or removes the flora when you remove ingredients from it. It's such a simple and obvious addition, you wonder why it was absent from the start - pay attention Bethesda!

Fight Club



First rule of Fight Club: letting go of the 'W' key = camping

COME AND
TAKE ON THE
ZONE STAFF IN
OUR MONTHLY
ONLINE GAMING
FREE-FOR-ALL!

WELCOME TO THE place where you can take out your everyday frustrations on *PC ZONE* in the form of a ritual slaughter of the cack-handed editorial team. Due to unforeseen technical issues this month, *Quake 4* multiplayer was hastily replaced by old faithful *Counter-Strike: Source*, which at least gave us a fighting chance of surviving more than a few seconds without being railgunned in the face.

Even though we also managed to pick EXACTLY the same time – to the second

– that *Half-Life 2: Episode One* was released on Steam (how about that for perfect planning?), you still loyally turned up to enjoy an hour of unremitting team-based mayhem on three of our favourite maps: *de_nuke*, *de_dust* and *de_inferno*.

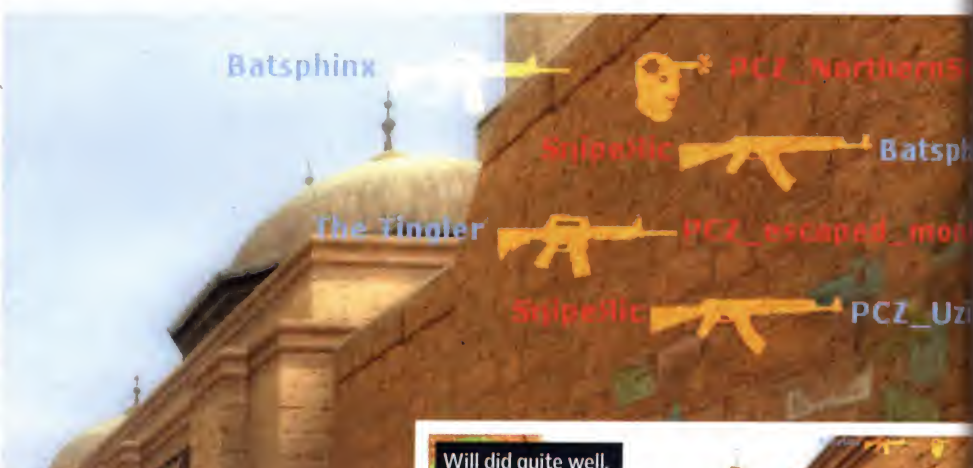
Session highlights included Suzy popping up from behind a wall and fragging an extremely startled Hogarty, Will's terrifying outburst on being shot from a distance by a particularly lucky headshot from Sefton, and the general

excellence of play from Hot_Madras, The Tinger, Tempest and SnipeRic. It was carnage as usual, but in among the flailing limbs and slumping ragdoll bodies was a collection of excellent tag winners (see right).

If you'd like to join in the next *PC ZONE* Fight Club, make sure you check out the forum at www.pczone.co.uk on Thursday, June 29. We'll be playing the new *Prey* multiplayer demo (on this month's DVD) from 6pm – see you then!



We're guessing the hole's on fire.



Batsphinx

PCZ_NorthernS

SnipeRic

Batsph

The Tinger

PCZ_escaped_mon

SnipeRic

PCZ_UZ



Oh my god! They killed off four main characters at once!



Will did quite well.



He's missed his alarm again.

AND THE WINNER IS...

Play to win every month!

EVERY FIGHT CLUB, as well as having innumerable bullet-holes pumped into our poor unfortunate avatars, we pick out the best tags and screenshots from the night sent in by you. The winners of the screenshot and tag compos will then be sent something rather tasty through Her Majesty's Postal Service (providing they don't help themselves).

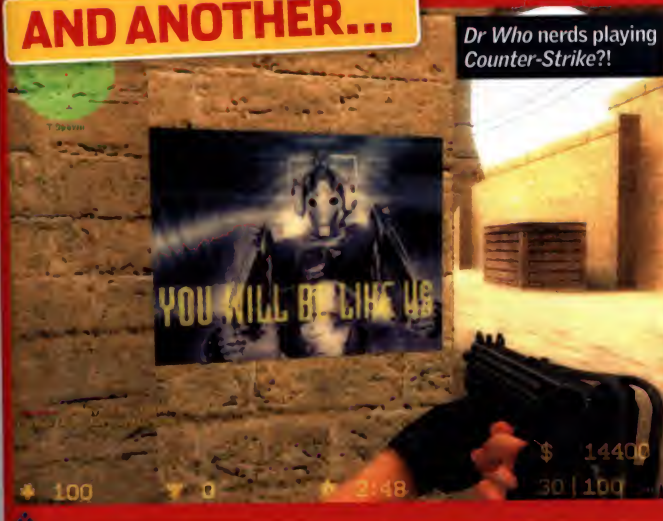
This month, however, there were some very special tags (including one too rude to print), so we've decided to give the prizes to two of the best – The Tinger's magnificent Cybermen tribute and SnipeRic's satirical swipe at the leader of the free world.

If you'd like a chance to win a PC gaming prize, join in our Fight Club and send your screenshots and tags to fightclubscreenshots@pczone.co.uk. Hooray and hooroo!

BEST TAG



AND ANOTHER...



ZONE CHAT



It's good to talk. And type.
Tippety tappety lol...

THIS MONTH, JUST to test your loyalty, we deliberately didn't hype up the fact that **ZONE Chat** was happening on our forums or by randomly informing strangers on the tube. The result was Steve and Log discussing Nando's chicken in an empty chatroom for five minutes, before a few of you began trickling in, mewing phrases like, "Oh, is **ZONE Chat** on? I didn't know."

Within moments though, the crowd expanded into a bustling rabble of **ZONERS**. Like curious people wandering to a car crash, baying to talk about Americans stealing our Queens, our Churchills and our Hitlers, before clawing at us for prizes. An impromptu quiz from Log all about Steve's inadequacies was won by reids, who successfully guessed his bizarre phobia of ketchup. Next **ZONE Chat** will be on June 28 at 5pm, when all discussion of tomato sauce will be banned to protect Hogarty's fragile grip on sanity.



How to join in!

If you fancy joining the **ZONE Chat**, then you'll need an IRC program and a Net connection. We recommend mIRC and you can find it on side two of our DVD. Just install the program, set the options, devise an online identity that'll make you stand out from the crowd, connect to a Quakenet server nearest to you, type /join #pcz into the command line, and hey presto, you're there! Chatting with the friendliest bunch of online readers you could hope to find. Remember, play nice and don't be rude.



Can't make Fight Club?

If you can't make it to Fight Club – perhaps your flatmate's sending a long email to an ex, he's crying and you don't want to disturb him – then join other **PCZ** readers on the following public servers. **ZONE** staff might even be there. The latest information can always be found at www.zonegames.co.uk.

WHO'S WHO

Jamie Sefton **PCZ_NorthernScum**
Will Porter **PCZ_Batsphinx**
Suzy Wallace **PCZ_Uzibat**
Steve Hogarty **PCZ_escaped_monkey**
Andy Robinson **PCZ_EssexHoodlum**
Phil Wand **PCZ_People's Front Of Judea**
Jon Blyth **PCZ_Log**

1 SWAT 4
swat4.zonegames.co.uk

2 COUNTER-STRIKE: SOURCE
cs1.zonegames.co.uk:27015
cs2.zonegames.co.uk:27025
cs3.zonegames.co.uk:27015

3 HALF-LIFE 2: DEATHMATCH
hl2.zonegames.co.uk:27065

4 DAY OF DEFEAT: SOURCE
dod.zonegames.co.uk:27085

5 BATTLEFIELD 1942 DC MODDED
dc.zonegames.co.uk:14567

6 TEAM FORTRESS CLASSIC
tfc.zonegames.co.uk:27045

7 WOLFENSTEIN: ENEMY TERRITORY
et.zonegames.co.uk:27960

8 UNREAL TOURNAMENT 2004
ut1.zonegames.co.uk:7777
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9 CALL OF DUTY
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10 JOINT OPERATIONS: TYPHOON RISING
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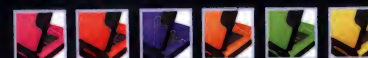
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- Create like a Pro.



Need:

A copy of *Ghost Recon: Advanced Warfighter*
A very expensive PC
A washing-up liquid bottle

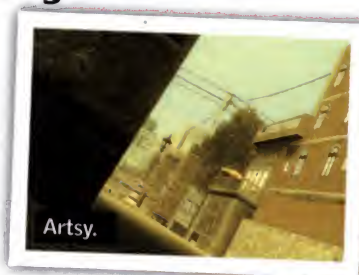
What you'll get:

- ✓ Proficient at laser tag
- ✓ Slight racist tendencies towards Mexicans
- ✓ Hairy palms
- ✗ An escape from US jurisdiction

Fight an advanced war in... Ghost Recon: Advanced Warfighter

Steve Hogarty takes point and unearths the basics of near-future tactical shooting

THERE'S NO GETTING away from it: *Advanced Warfighter* is a difficult game. Even if you admit weakness by selecting the easiest difficulty setting, deceptively titled 'Easy', you'll find it's actually still quite hard. Stand in the open too long and you'll be pirouetting through the air in an arc of blood before you can say, "I can't believe you got me, you pesky Mexican rebel!" Conversely, stay under cover too long and it turns into a battle of endurance you just can't win. So where do you strike the balance? Where's the pivot of this maddening see-saw of peril? Right here on these very pages...

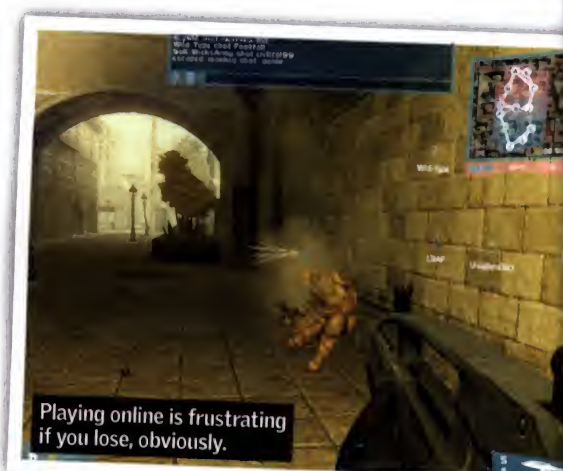


01 WALK, DON'T RUN

Everything your teacher ever said was true, especially the parts about walking, not running. Gazelles run, and look where it got them; Africa. So while you will feel inclined to run as fast as you can in any first-person shooter, be aware that *Advanced Warfighter* punishes you for it. You can't fire a gun while running, your ability to strafe and turn is hampered and your accuracy is lowered while you catch your breath. Instead, walk – approach corners carefully and only run when you know there are no enemies about. Patience, as you may have heard, is a virtue.

02 One lump or six?

Most of your weapons can switch between semi-automatic and full-automatic firing modes, and knowing when to use each mode is important. If you're out in the open and need to fire over a distance, a single round is far more accurate. In confined alleyways, full-automatic will do far more damage. Can you guess which mode was being used when Jesus (from *The Big Lebowski*, not the other one) said he'd stick a gun "up your ass and pull the f***ing trigger 'til it goes click"? That's right – he was referring to a semi-automatic, as he'd have to repeatedly pull the trigger to empty the clip.



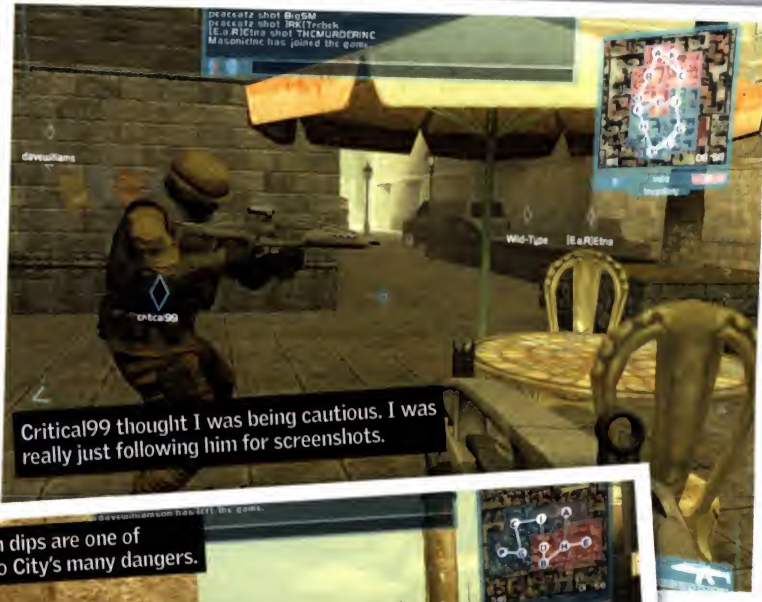
03 EQUIPPED TO IMPRESS

Whether playing online or off, it's handy to know when and where you can change your weapons loadout. Each weapon has pros and cons, but it's really down to your own playing style to determine which you want bobbing about the bottom of your screen. The M8 Carbine's the best all-rounder, whereas the Scars tend more towards assault – and the machine gun and sniper entries speak for themselves. As for accessories, always grab the combat sights – and if you favour full-automatic, get the front grip to improve stability. Grenades and extra ammo fill up any extra space you have.



04 Hand of squad

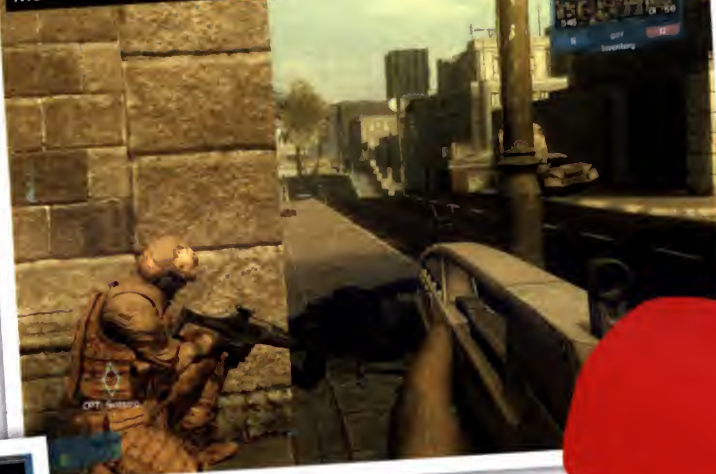
While some may say your squad is the best weapon in the war against yada yada, they'd be wrong – that'll be the ZEUS RPG. You can't launch Private Allen at a tank and have it explode into a thousand bits of tank – that would be stupid. Still, your squad is important. If too many of them die, load your last saved game instead of pressing onwards. Use the move command to keep them ahead of or beside you, as the follow command means they trail uselessly behind. Equip a squad member with a rocket launcher and commands to attack tanks or helicopters will be followed.



05 BODY SHOP

There's nothing more unnerving than looking down and not seeing your legs – unless you didn't have them in the first place, in which case it's probably quite expected. But unlike games where your body is simply for show, in *Advanced Warfighter* if you can actually see your foot sticking out around a corner, it's liable to be shot at. It's good to keep this in mind when playing online, or just trying to play stealthily. Different stances generally work in different situations: stand to move about, crouch to take cover and return fire and prone when you simply have nowhere to hide.

Hidden dips are one of Mexico City's many dangers.



You won't have to use this map very often.



06 Tic-Tactician

The underlying theme of *Advanced Warfighter* is that modern warfare is 90% technology and 10% manpowerology. Missions where you're afforded the use of the recon drone supply you with it for a reason, so use it and move it about to constantly keep tabs on every unit's position on the battlefield. Remember, it can't see through walls, so keep on your guard as some enemies may remain hidden. Use the overhead map to plot waypoints for your troops, and click-and-drag to tell them what direction to look once they get there.

07 GRENADE PARADE

Grenades are criminally underused or misused in games. *Advanced Warfighter's* grenades are odd in that they're not thrown from the centre of your screen as you'd expect, but instead emanate from above your head and to the right – as they (sort of) would in real life. This means you'll bounce a grenade back into your face on your first attempt. Once you get the hang of them though, use them to flush enemies out into the open, destroy certain targets or vandalise somebody's car. Smoke grenades are extremely useful on the urban maps too, allowing you to cross streets with smoky anonymity.



08

WESLEY SNIPES

Advanced Warfighter features the Barrett M99 sniper rifle, which is powerful enough to blast an A4-sized hole in the side of an elephant from 200 yards. This is balanced in the online mode by the fact that it's so bloody expensive to buy. If you come across somebody using it, take cover until they fire off a round before popping your head out to see if you can get a few shots in. Otherwise, try to remain prone while using it – not only will you increase your accuracy, but you'll also be relatively safe if the person you're shooting at has read this guide too. **PCZ**

Retro ZONE

EMULATION
OF THE
MONTH

All the best in emulation, abandonware and shameless gaming nostalgia...

Visual Pinball

BALLY, WILLIAMS, DATA EAST.

Gottlieb – these hallowed names were once world-famous, synonymous with a raft of classic pinball tables. Now that it's nearly game over for mechanical pinball (without much hope of an extra ball), the PC is keeping the finger-flipping memories of the mechanical marvels alive with a couple of superb emulators.

Created by a passionate, hardcore base of pinball wizards, Visual Pinball is a table-creation and playing tool, while VPinMAME simulates those dot-matrix displays that appeared above the play area from the 1980s onwards. We've covered these excellent emu programs before in *PC ZONE*, and it always used to be a bit of a pain (to put it lightly) getting the two to work together. However, salvation is here in the form of a new program – VP Launcher – now

available for download, which makes pinball emulation as easy as racking up 500,000 points.

Once set up, you'll have access to hundreds of tables from pinball's past lovingly recreated by fans, including *Star Wars* and *Twilight Zone*. The pinball machine's last (and some say greatest) period was the early 1990s, when such classics as *Twilight Zone* and *The Addams Family* were sold in their thousands. What's even more fun, though, is searching the extensive archive for pop culture oddities such as *Guns N' Roses* (based on the rrrawrk band), *Dr Who* and *Dirty Harry*. If you love pinball sims, you need these emulators on your desktop immediately – check out our fave table recommendations below and send us your best scores.

BUT HOW?

Take the frustration out of emulation

An emulator is basically a program which tricks your super-powered gaming PC into thinking it's a pinball machine, SNES, Amiga, slot machine etc. The emulators are entirely legal, but due to vague publishing issues, it's not always legal to own certain game files (known as ROMs). However, if you own the original pinball tables (and you do, right?), you can get these fantastic emulations running using the links below...

Links...

1 VP Launcher

www.pinballsim.com

All the info you need to run pinball emulation on your PC. Follow the instructions...

2 Visual Pinball

www.vpforums.com

A vibrant community with questions and answers on a world full of flippers and steel balls.

If you love pinball sims, you need these emulators on your desktop now

SIX OF THE BEST

The half-dozen pinball tables you must play...

1 TWILIGHT ZONE
A top table made by Data East in 1993, and famed for its gumball machine with special ceramic ball.

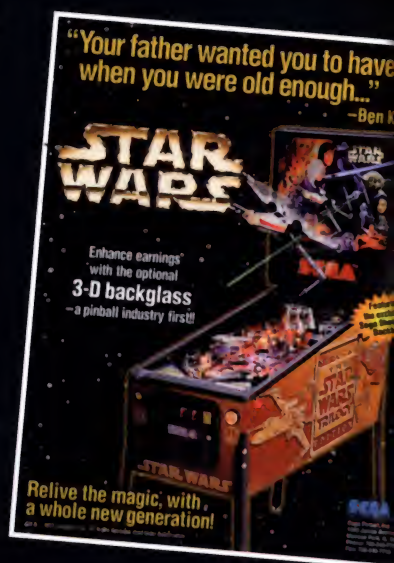
2 STAR WARS
Another by Data East (1990), this is the best *Star Wars* pinball, with a fully-animated R2-D2.

3 INDIANA JONES
Williams whipped up this action-packed table in 1993, and featured all three Indy films.

4 THE ADDAMS FAMILY
Creepy, kooky and the best-selling pinball table of all time. Made by Bally in 1992.

5 TALES FROM THE CRYPT
Another Data East classic, which features the voice of the Crypt Keeper, packed with sick animations.

6 THE SIMPSONS
Data East in 1990. Apu says "Come Again!" when the ball save is activated, which is good enough for us.



NOW & THEN

Shadow Warrior – the shooter with Wang

NOW



PREY, 2006

THEN

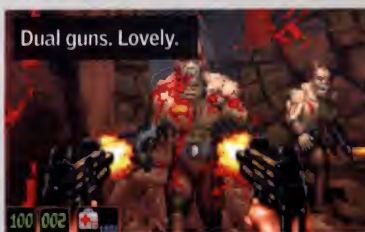


SHADOW WARRIOR, 1997

CAN YOU REMEMBER a time when you could watch a pixelated women defecating on a toilet as the videogame protagonist blared, "Hoooo! What you eat anyway, baby?" *Shadow Warrior* was 3D Realms' 1997 tongue-in-cheek shooter, starring a sword-slashing, gun-wielding American-Indian hero, Lo Wang. Delivered in the same spirit as its stable-mate *Duke Nukem 3D*, *Shadow Warrior* was an uproarious, violent blaster, with an explosive interactive environment, vehicles and swordfighting that we handed 80% in issue 56.

Today, 3D Realms' superb shooter *Prey* (p58) straightens out the stereotypes with Tommy, an American Indian in touch with his religious and cultural past – and he doesn't even perform rain dances or make 'woo-woo' sounds with his hand on his mouth.

That's not to say *Prey* doesn't share the humour of its sprite-laden cousin though; naked pole-dancers may be noticeably absent, but there's an abundance of one-liners and crazy arcade machines that wouldn't look at all out of place in the '97 ninja shooter. The bump-mapping's moved on a bit though...



Dual guns. Lovely.

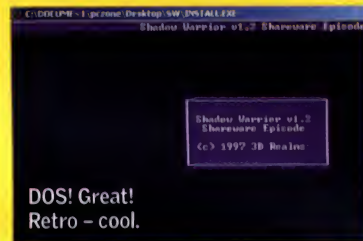
PLAY IT!

PCZONE

ON THE DVD

Scared of using our DVD? Follow this handy guide and you'll be playing the *Shadow Warrior* demo in no time – you don't even need to run an emulator such as DOSBox for this one...

- 1 Insert side 1 of the DVD into your DVD drive. Make sure you don't confuse your DVD drive with a blamcange – it could get messy.
- 2 Choose *Shadow Warrior* from the demo section and prepare to enter the wacky world of DOS.
- 3 Follow the on-screen instructions, enter your desired install directory and try not to be frightened by the newly developed useless-ness of your mouse.
- 4 Find where you installed it, run setup.exe and chose 'save and play' to erm, save and play. The demo has a 'Mature' rating, so there's lots of blood and gore in it – hide it from your kids.



DOS! Great!
Retro – cool.

MAME FRAME

Robotron 2084

DEVELOPER Williams YEAR 1982

IN 1980, NAMCO were appealing to newcomers and ladies with their welcoming, buttonless *Pac-Man*. Williams, however, made the clear decision to screw the newcomers, and threw bagfuls of buttons at their *Defender* machine. It had the all the buttons from *Asteroids*: thrust, fire and the suicidal panic button that was hyperspace. Then it added smart bomb and reverse, and subjected you to eye-swerving side-scrolling action defending the last peg-like ten members of the human race.

Williams' *Defender* summed up that 'screw you all, I'm a big cabinet' attitude

that defied reduction into a generic, four-buttoned cabinet. And Williams' *Robotron: 2084*, the first game to use two 8-directional joysticks did it again in 1982.

You're still saving the human race, this time a hapless, repetitive family who wander around, getting maimed by green hulks or converted into killer progs by blue brains. The onslaught was intense and relentless, the joysticks were sturdy and *Geometry Wars* was inspired. *Smash TV* repeated the formula in 1990, but it was upsettingly diluted crap. Power-ups? Rooms? Pffft.



ROBOTRON 2084



Two joysticks
= more fun.

WHAT IS MAME?

MAME is an emulator for over 6,000 arcade games, and is perfectly legal. However, on its own it's useless, and requires ROMs to play all the old coin-ops. These ROMs are copyrighted, so it's illegal to own them unless you own the arcade machine. We're not nagging, we're just letting you know.



One of the best
games of all time.



"I feel so alone..."

BACK IN THE DAY...



2. Duke Nukem 3D

By Suzy Wallace

Back in the mists of time (well, 1996), 3D Realms issued a title that changed my gaming experience forever – *Duke Nukem 3D*. The reason it made such an impact was the last bit of the name – *Duke* was the first game I'd ever played in true 3D. If you're younger than me you may be chuckling, but before then, 3D was a luxury your computer's 8MB of RAM could barely afford. All of a sudden, there were corners to be rounded, angles to be ogled and a vertical axis to make use of. The next couple of hours were spent jumping through windows, crawling through air ducts and running about like someone who's just escaped from a windowless confine. Which in a way, we had.

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STEVE HILL'S NeverQuest



Steve Hill gets sunk up to the nuts in *Second Life*

I'M SAT AT a poker table with my cock out watching *Anal Sluts & Sweethearts 12*. While that may sound like a particularly vivid stress dream, perhaps pertaining to my forthcoming appearance in the World Series Of Poker, more terrifyingly is it's actually happening. OK, maybe not in real life, but in *Second Life*, the online virtual community for perverts, peepers and pederasts.

Regular readers may recall my adventures here some time back, and to be honest I thought I'd buried it. Just when you think you're out, they drag you back in, and so I find myself at The Barbie Club sporting a flat cap, a camp chin-glove and a pair of skin-tight shorts. As one patron shrewdly observes: "You look ridiculous."

MONEY MONEY MONEY

No-one is here to look at me though, as the place is full of writhing female flesh. You can look, and you can also touch, for the right fee, with real dollars transferable into in-game currency and vice versa. Some of the virtual performers claim to make a real-life living, and in many ways it's the modern equivalent of some old bag talking grot on a premium rate chat-line.

To be honest, there's enough here for an entire sociological thesis, but in time-

honoured fashion, let's just keep it filthy. Assuming the cunning moniker, NeverQuest Tripp, I have a pocket full of bollocks and a wallet full of cash. 250 Linden dollars – named after the creators – to be precise, which in The Barbie Club doesn't buy you a great deal, with a premium escort service setting you back a grand. Seeking value, I accept the invitation to 'Get Jiggy In Our Pussy Room' and hand over the requisite £50. Immediately realising the error of my ways, it dawns on me that I've hired a private room on my own, as it's essentially just me and a bed.

On the plus side, I do buy myself a 'newbie penis' for a dollar and re-emerge wearing it with pride, much to the consternation of Max Rich, who pleads: "Jesus Christ, NeverQuest, put it away man." Having already spunked (not literally) a fifth of my stack, I'm as angry as the enormous phallus emerging from my shorts. "Nice cock," observes Kitten Mostel, by way of balance.

TURKISH DELIGHT

Looking to assuage the rage, I get talking to a bisexual Turkish dancer called Gokhan Sartre. Warning me that English is not her first language, she goes on to explain: "I have many girl friend and

we are doing a lot of naught thing together. we are doing real bad things you dont want to hear."

If you can't talk proper, I probably don't, and so peruse the room for further filth. Lured by the sound of bestial grunting, I turn the corner to be confronted with a wall of hardcore pornography, featuring actual human beings, including classical actress Jenna Jameson, no less, with an option to buy the DVDs.

Buoyed by the find, I return to the main room in search of some action. Turning to the Escort Of The Week, one Alexis Summer, I coyly ask: "Do you do lap dances?"

"Sure, why not? Let's go baby," she acquiesces, and leads me to the champagne room where I give her £150.

The dance itself is the usual slightly hollow and disappointing experience, although she does tell me in explicit detail what she gets up to with her female friends – and their cats. When it grinds to the inevitable embarrassing halt, I complain that she didn't even take her top off. Astonishingly, she claims that it's off, despite the evidence to the contrary, and accuses me of being some kind of conman. She eventually believes me and generously refunds my money, at

which point her top springs off, presumably due to some extreme lag.

STAR WHORES

Through a further glitch, the argument somehow continues into the club staff room, which is strictly out of bounds to punters. I have struck the motherlode, and lay back eagerly on the fur rug to enjoy the returning strippers getting changed. It's not a situation they're comfortable with, and they immediately flip, ordering me to get out.

"Please leave, I have my bodyguards coming right now," barks Kiersten Harrington. "Like I'm dead scared," I smugly reply. "I will talk to the owners," she sternly warns. "Bothered," I scoff. "One of your whores tried to rip me off anyway."

By now subjected to a three-way verbal assault, I remain resolute, like a priapic schoolboy – still with my piece out, remember – as the threats escalate. With tempers fraying, the situation is finally resolved when, in an unlikely development, R2-D2 rolls in and zaps me back onto the street. I have been kicked out of a strip club by R2-D2. That, categorically, has never happened in real life.

Not Hill's type of place at all...



She's your private dancer, but Tina Turner has better legs...



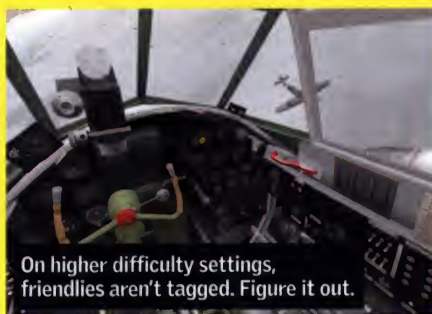
On the plus side, I buy myself a 'newbie penis' for a dollar and re-emerge wearing it with pride...



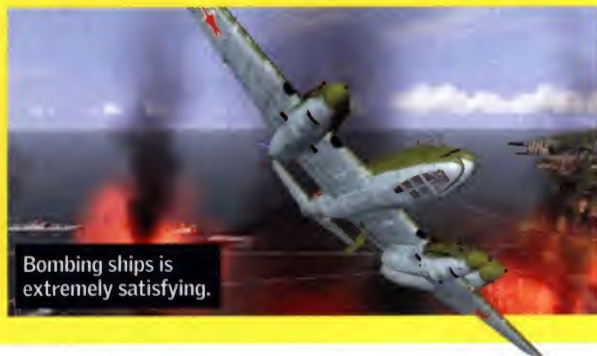
SPECIAL EDITION

IL-2 STURMOVIK: COMPLETE EDITION

Steve Hogarty used to be a fly boy. Still is, now you mention it...



On higher difficulty settings, friendlies aren't tagged. Figure it out.



Bombing ships is extremely satisfying.

DEVELOPER IC: Maddox Games
PUBLISHER Ubisoft
WEBSITE
www.pacific-fighters.com
PRICE £19.99

IN THE BOX

IL-2 Sturmovik
IL-2 Sturmovik:
Forgotten Battles
IL-2 Sturmovik:
Ace Expansion Pack
Pacific Fighters



UNLESS THE MAN lied to me, my granddad fought in World War II. He fought, as many Irish people did, for the British Forces in Africa. He manned, as many soldiers did, artillery. He was captured, as many soldiers were, by Nazis, and imprisoned in a prison camp for a short while. He smoked all his life, died of natural causes at the age of something in the very high 90s, and he reminded me of the 'very, very drunk' old man from *The Fast Show*. I have his eyebrows, not his actual ones, I'm talking about genetics – and at some point in his life I'm sure he saw an operational WWII fighter plane.

And that's my tenuous link to *IL-2 Sturmovik Series: Complete Edition*, a compilation of the original *IL-2 Sturmovik*

game, plus every ounce of content that has dripped from its historical orifice subsequently. *Forgotten Battles*, the *Ace Expansion Pack* and *Pacific Fighters* all make an appearance on the DVD, and combine to create the most comprehensive and enjoyable World War II fighter simulation you could imagine.

SIMULATION STATION

Simulations are an odd breed of genre, classically tied to PC gaming and traditionally played by people with unwashed beards and large foreheads. However, any good simulation knows that in order to create the most believable and involving experience, you've got to take the good with the bad, the blazing glory with the flap adjustments, and the near-air misses with the formation controls.



Think that one might be a Nazi.



Bombing runs are available, if you can keep your plane in one piece.

We'll just have to assume this is accurate.

...Or you could just do tricks.

IL-2 Sturmovik balances this perfectly, offering all of the lovely pedantry that satisfies that nerd deep inside of you, while feeding your corporeal mind with guns, intense air battles and death-defying manoeuvres.

A typical mission sees you start at the end of a runway, sitting silently in your fully-3D cockpit. You hear the distant clicks of your wingmen's engines coming to life, before scrambling for the manual and finding out how to do the same yourself.

Graphically, *IL-2 Sturmovik* is still impressive. You can look about the cockpit at any time, which in a functional sense allows you to scan the horizon for enemy planes; and in an aesthetic sense, reminds you that you're 2,000ft above the snowy Russian plains in a 1,680-horsepower cannon with wings. What's more, tiny details in the cockpits of older planes such as tears in the leather seats,

dents, scratches and peeling paint all nail down that sense of realism.

CANINE COMBAT

Once airborne, missions (and maybe your desire to play 'properly') expect you to keep formation, but never punish you for taking on objectives yourself. Gentle adjustments of engine power, slight movements of the joystick, memories of shows you saw on the History Channel – all of these keep you zooming through the sky at 300kmph in a vague sense of peace. The drone of each engine is recreated perfectly in the fantastic sound engine, with Doppler effects, distance muffling and sine waves all being calculated with dramatic effect. You see, even the boring parts of being a WWII fighter pilot become special in this game.

Then you spot them. The Allies, the Russians, the Luftwaffe, whoever you've been sent out to kill. *IL-2 Sturmovik's*

realism will come as a sharp slap in the face to fans of arcade-equivalents such as *Secret Weapons Over Normandy* or *Blazing Angels: Squadrons Of WWII*.

You have extremely limited ammunition and a very fragile plane. The only chance you have of coming out of a dogfight as victor is to get as close to your foe as possible, staying on his tail until you're sure every round of the single-second burst of machine gun fire waiting under your thumb will hit its target. At any moment, seven or so bullet-holes may spatter across your plane from an unseen gunner, your cockpit window may become peppered with bullet-holes, you may lose an aileron and damage your fuel tank. *IL-2's* dynamic damage system alters the flight model, meaning you're piloting a wavering time-bomb, a black streak of flaming aerodynamic metal shooting through the sky. You eject, hopefully in one, unflaming piece.



You can sit in the gunner's seat if there is one.



Which one adjusts the seat?



You'll believe a plane can fly.

So what's Oleg up to now? *IL-2* creator busies himself with *Storm Of War: Battle Of Britain*

Oleg Maddox, the most famous Russian since Robbie Coltrane in *GoldenEye*, has not yet tired of the collective exhibits of the Imperial War Museum at Duxford. His new *Storm Of War* franchise is set to dazzle with new tech, damage modelling, scaleable gameplay and the fresh rolling fields of this green and pleasant land. We'll be going 'up diddly up' and 'down diddly down down' with it in future issues...



No other WWII flight sim can boast such a comprehensive experience... This is simply as good as WWII simulation gets



Anti-aircraft: the clue's in the name.

No other WWII flight sim can boast such a comprehensive experience. The expansions up the plane count to over 200 (including the amazing Go 229 German flying wing bomber and their other forays into jet technology), and online play is available for up to 128 players on 29 maps. This is as good as WWII simulation gets, and if you even have a passing interest in the ramblings of an old veteran with false teeth who deliberately took them out to scare me, then you need to play this. **PC7**

THE RAVAGES OF TIME

IL-2 SERIES	1st
SECRET WEAPONS OVER NORMANDY	2nd
BLAZING ANGELS: SQUADRONS OF WWII	3rd

The creations of Oleg Maddox are one of the few bright lights in entertaining PC flight simulation. *Secret Weapons* and *Blazing Angels* don't hold a 1940s animal-fat candle to it.

SUPERTEST

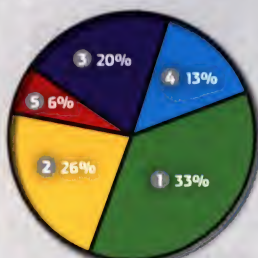
FREE GAMES



Free games are great (if they're any good), but which make you care for them? Which give you that flicker of hope for humanity's future? The **PC ZONE** team discuss...

YOUR VIEW

Last month's subject: Funny Ho Ha Games. Here's what you all thought...



- SECRET OF MONKEY ISLAND 1st
- GRIM FANDANGO 2nd
- PSYCHONAUTS 3rd
- DAY OF THE TENTACLE 4th
- GARRY'S MOD 5th

Reverend Joseph: "Day Of The Tentacle, yay!"

TheTingler: "In trying to think up funny games that didn't have anything to do with LucasArts, you forgot the likes of *Giants*, *Evil Genius*, *Worms*, *Dungeon Keeper* and *Discworld*."

Liquid_metal: "Why is *Garry's Mod* in there? It's only as funny as you make it. You can make a funeral scene, which is hardly a laugh-a-minute."

Dogen_D_Derrible: "I've gone for *Grim Fandango*. I just love the game, and still think that characters like Manny and Glottis are some of the most fantastic game creations ever."

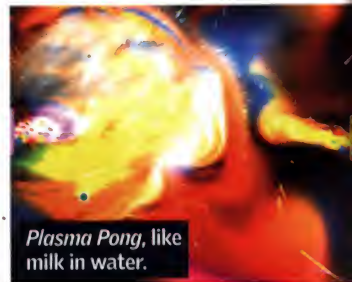
Reverend Joseph: "Oi! You put *Grim Fandango* in after I voted for *Day Of The Tentacle*. That's just corrupt! Do you work for the Bush administration?"

BEFORE WE GO on with this Free Games Supertest, it'd be wrong not to pay tribute to some of the games that went unmentioned in the Funny Games poll last month. There was some indignation – and lo, it was righteous – that certain games weren't mentioned. A few of them are included to the left, but here's an apologetic mention to *Giants: Citizen Kabuto*, *Evil Genius* and every other game that's ever done a funny in it.

Back to the matter in hand – free games. They're the hedgehogs of the gaming world; they've got that lovely scrunched-up face, which, in this torturous analogy, is the fact that they cost you nothing. But they're mostly infested with parasites and can skewer careless players to death with their awfulness. And you've no recourse in law, because you chose to play with hedgehogs in the first place.

Now we've emerged from that metaphor, what games have the **ZONE** staff loved of late? Kenta Cho's range of inspired shooters deserved a mention; in particular *Tumiki Fighters* and the 2D-*Rez*-meets-*Ikaruga* bullet madness of *rRootage*. *GridWars 2*, the game with surprising depth™, was discussed, as was frustrating madness like *Plasma Pong*, stylish feline ballistics with *Cannon Cat* and the finest stickman physics ninja platformer ever, *N*. We forgot to mention *GTA*, now officially free to download, and *Wolfenstein: ET*.

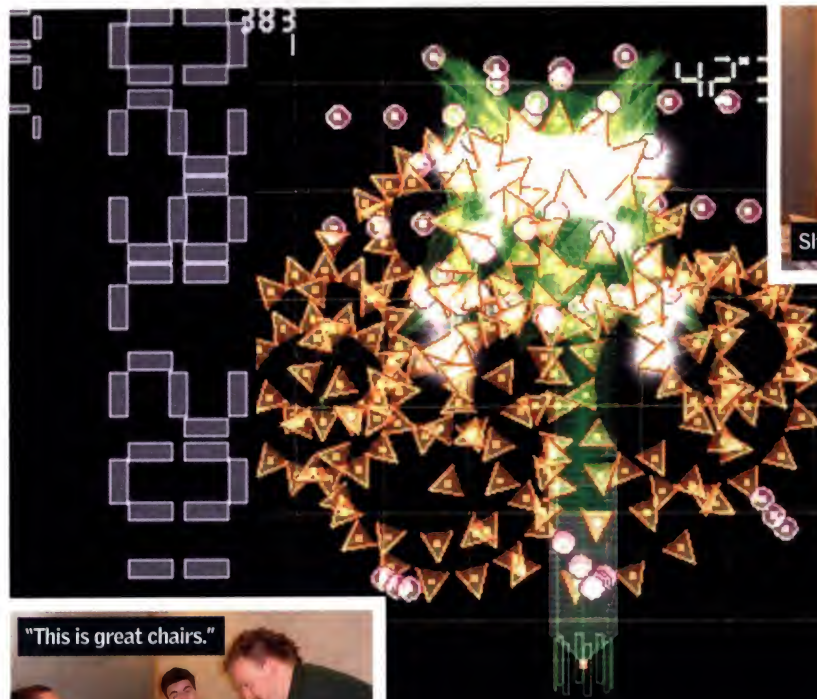
Like always, once you've listened to our fat-mouthed banter and witless chaff, flutter like hummingbirds over to the **PC ZONE** forums (www.pczone.co.uk), settling on the sticky nectar of the 'Supertest' thread and voting for your favourite. The best comments will be printed in issue 171.



Plasma Pong, like milk in water.



"That's no headcrab... That's my wife!"



"This is great chairs."



Shhh... We are thinking.



rRootage: the one Steve was on about.



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DEVELOPER'S COMMENTARY

CIVILIZATION IV

Will Porter gets on the blower to Firaxis and talks deep, dark diplomacy



CIVILISATION, TO QUOTE *Gremlins 2: The New Batch*, is, I think, what everyone wants and what very few have. The niceties. The fine points: diplomacy, compassion, standards, manners, tradition... That's what we're reaching toward. Oh, we may stumble along the way, but civilisation, yes.

The Geneva Convention, chamber music, Susan Sontag. Everything our society has worked so hard to accomplish over the centuries, that's what we aspire to; we want to be civilised. Are *PC ZONE* readers civilised? No, clearly not. Fun, but in no sense civilised. Not like Soren Johnson (lead designer) and Barry Caudill (senior producer) – who, alongside Sid Meier, are the godfathers of all things *Civ*. Not at all.



"Religions are like flavours – from a gameplay point of view, they're functionally identical"

Soren Johnson, lead designer, *Civilization IV*

01 LASTING APPEAL: Johnson: "I think it's two things that come together. First off, it's a great topic: everyone wants to be king and rule the world. The other thing that makes it work is the turn-based gameplay that came about way back in 1991 – it's something that really hooks people into these multiple goals they're trying to accomplish over many, many turns. People feel like there's always something more to achieve: 'I gotta get that next tech', 'I gotta finish the Pyramids', 'I gotta found that next city'. So I think it's a match between great subject matter and really good gameplay mechanics. Either one on its own would be good, but I think them coming together is what makes *Civilization* so special."



02 KEEPING THE FANS HAPPY: Caudill: "It's a really tough tightrope to walk when you're on something like *Civ IV*: if you continue to cater to the hardcore guys, you're only going to cater to an ever-shrinking circle of people. You need to find a way to bring in new people, otherwise your franchise will die. So there's this great balancing act, where we say, 'let's make this accessible, but let's also add this feature that the hardcore guys want'. We also did stuff like adding difficulty levels that were lower than anything we've ever had for previous games. It's always a constant back and forth, 'is that too complex?' or 'is that too simple?'. Eventually though, we all agree and pull it off."





Rather peaceful for a holy city.

03 FOUNDING CIV RELIGION: Johnson: "Religion was the one really obvious and interesting topic from history that we'd never dealt with directly. It was clear to everyone that was the most likely place where we could make some good progress gameplay-wise, but we'd never done it before because it was an area of potential controversy – people might get upset and start to hate us. We were pretty conservative though. Religions are pretty much flavours – fundamentally, there's no difference between Islam, Christianity and Hinduism – from a pure gameplay point of view they're functionally identical. The interesting part comes from how it actually plays out in the game – religions getting founded, spreading through the world and their effect on diplomatic relations. It took a lot of time to get the right version too – we tried about five or six different systems before we hit the right one."

Caudill: "One of the big differences in the earlier versions was that the player was a little bit detached from religion in the game. There was a hidden algorithm going on in the background that would determine how religion was spreading through the world, spreading along rivers or trade routes between civilisations that had diplomatic relations. You would see your religion naturally spreading throughout your cities and you could do a few things to affect it, but it was only a secondary effect. It sounded good on paper, but fundamentally when you're playing *Civ*, all the games systems work because the player is in control."



Hooligans are tooled up well this year...

04 MASTERING AI: Caudill: "There really is no specific trick to designing AI – you just have to put in the time to test it. What I used to do was automated AI testing, where every night I'd have a couple of computers run a game of *Civ IV* throughout the whole game with the AI playing. Next morning, I'd use that to make sure they were using their workers correctly and putting their cities in the right place. The real trick about AI though, isn't a question of how good it is to play against, but how fun it is to play against. What you need is people playing against the AI as early as possible. That's why we had our secret pre-beta group – people from our fan community – 50-100 people that we pulled aside a year and a half before the game was shipped and gave them a chance to play. We got lots of feedback on how the AI was playing; whether it was too aggressive, too passive, whether it was frustrating to deal with diplomacy, wasn't making dumb moves, wasn't taken advantage of specific situations and so on."

"Honey, come quick – I can see our house from here..."



05 WHY THE MULTIPLAYER LOVE?: Caudill: "Because of *Play The World* (Laughs). Every previous *Civ* product was a single-player game, and every single one of them was a single-player product where we tried to put multiplayer on top of them."

Johnson: "We wanted to put our resources into a new area where we could really raise the bar: multiplayer. We knew that would impress a lot of people and make people view *Civ* in a different way. A good chunk of the *Civilization* gameplay is never going to change, so you need to look for things like multiplayer to really improve."





Yet another sucker signing up to a pyramid lending scheme.

06 MUSIC TO WATCH THE YEARS GO BY:

Johnson: "Sourcing the music was one of my favourite parts of the project. I set out a long-term goal to find good pieces to use from every point in history. I was fairly familiar with the baroque, so I got in contact with some musician friends of mine to get me some good requisitions for renaissance and medieval. I listened to those, found some good pieces and came up with the idea of using John Adams for the modern age. I found that pieces with big climaxes aren't that good since you don't want to take the player out of their experience – so you hear some second or third symphonies that don't start with a bang or end with a bang, along with a lot of dances that work well as they keep the same level and don't really go up or down."



07 BIT LIKE THE LION KING: Johnson: "The main music was an original composition written for *Civ IV*. It was inspired by another piece that we wanted to use, but we couldn't for various legal reasons. The composer of that piece was a guy I was familiar with from college – he was my room-mate – and he's worked on films like *X-Men* and various commercials. He had a really good grasp of that world music African thing, so I called him up and asked him if he could make an inspiring flagship piece. He knew a great group who would do it for us – they're an a capella group from Stanford. He wrote the piece for them and we got it to fit well with the earth and the sunrise. We've had loads of great feedback from it – people seem to love it."

Somewhere like this deserves a good theme tune.





09 GETTING POLITICAL: Caudill: "In terms of which historical characters get included, we certainly don't want to alienate people – but at the same time if something makes sense, it makes sense; it's another tightrope we walk. We've had a few emails about the inclusion of Stalin as a leader for Russia in the *Warlords* expansion, and we also got a lot of emails when we included the Arabs in *Play The World*, in terms of who we chose as a leader and how it affected different people. We try to do our homework and make sure the person is there for a reason. Generally, we talk to scholars and find out what the real story is." **PC2**

Leonard also makes an excellent snooker rest.



08 THE LOGICAL CHOICE: Caudill: "We had several people we were trying to get for the voice-acting. We had lots of people lined up, we were back and forth with Patrick Stewart and thought we had him, but all of a sudden he wasn't available anymore. So we sat down with the licensing guy from 2K and he showed us a list of guys and it was like: "Oh, Spock!" We hooked him up and got him in the studio twice, once to do some initial recording and a second time to do some clean-up stuff, and it worked incredibly well. He has this great recognisable voice – it really brings you in and makes you feel comfortable. What's more, just hearing the science officer from *Star Trek* giving all the tech quotes is great, y'know?"



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Thursday, July 20. We might have won the
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DOMINIK DIAMOND

I'd like to stay and taste my first champagne. Yes? No...

"I've never played any of the games I've written about. Steve Hill found out and grassed me up"



WELL IT ONLY seemed like a year ago that I achieved one of my dream media jobs

and became a *PC ZONE* columnist. But all good things must come to an end, and some average things too. So this will be my final writings for this great magazine. Why? Below are a range of reasons, four of which are true, but only one of which is relevant. But which are which? Answers on a postcard to www.forf***ssakeimonlyjoking.com by the end of tomorrow...

1. Channel 5 were so bowled over by the *Crucify Me* film I made about my attempted religious reawakening (airing primetime at the end of June) that I have to make the sequel *Resurrect Me* immediately, in which I travel to Tibet to investigate ancient Daoist rebirthing rites. And they think the magazine is the work of the devil.

2. I'm back on the crack.

3. Because I was in more newspapers than the pope over Easter weekend, I've asked for ten times my previous fee so I can give

half of it to the poor of the Philippines. Future Publishing have baulked at this.

4. Will Porter has said: "It's me or him."

5. I realised I would never be as funny as either Mr Cursor or Charlie Brooker.

6. Kofi Annan led a crack team of Delta Force troops, which kicked down my door and liberated that Alienware of mine, which I've treated worse than a South American dictator treats his vilest whore.

7. My columns have been getting delivered later and later, to the extent that Jamie now has to go back in time to open the email.

8. I spend 95% of my time now in the world of *City Of Heroes*, and my 22nd level hero won't get the special power of 'Column writing' until level 42.

9. I've never actually played any of the games I've written about. Steve Hill found this out and grassed me up while he brought himself to a point of extreme pleasure using a sock as a receptacle.

10. I'm so unpopular with the readers that a recent focus group discovered that

they'd rather eat tramp's hair than read another word of mine.

11. They've cut the budgets, which meant this column had to go so the art department can continue to get their Thai inner organ massages.

12. I've fallen into a deep coma after the instruction manual for some flight simulator I can't be arsed even pretending I know about fell on my head.

13. I've just formed a band called The AM's featuring the people who work on my Xfm Scotland breakfast show and we're supporting !Forward Russia! on their forthcoming UK tour.

14. I bought a Nintendo Wii and will now only write about games you can play on consoles that sound like pish.

Who knows? All I can honestly say is that this always has been the best games magazine in the world for me. And still is, regardless of how much I've brought its standards down. It's been an honour to appear in its pages. Seriously. **PCZ**



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